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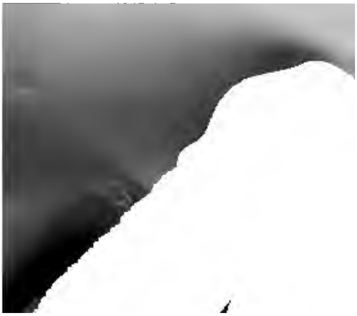

MAUDE TALBOT.

BODLEIANA BIBLIOTHECA

BY

HOLME LEE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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CHAPTER I.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

"SHE's a proud woman, I tell ye, sir!—there ain't her equal in England, Scotland, Ireland, and all the Colonies to boot. She's a female Tartar—that's what she is! My stars protect me from another encounter with the virago: though I'm afraid of no woman living,—of no woman living, sir!" Such was the tirade launched by the irascible Mr Tempest against the Lady of Houghton, in reply to a rather laudatory observation of his nephew, Colonel Gower. The young man chipped his egg in silence. Assuredly the old Squire's gout was very bad that morning; for after grumbling into his handkerchief, and spilling his tea over his legs, he broke forth again:

"Why don't you speak, sir?—ain't offended are ye? ("sulky young puppy!" *sotto voce.*) Never take up the cudgels for a woman so well able to defend herself,—a regular Semiramis she is! A nice life she leads that pretty young sister of hers, I'll be bound!—Proud female Lucifer!"

"She has her good points, sir: she is free from the weaknesses of her sex," said Colonel Gower.

"And that's a good point in your estimation, is it? I wish you joy of your taste," replied the old gentleman ironically. "I'll be shot if I used not to think woman's weakness her greatest charm! I never could endure your strong-minded, energetic females."

"You mistake me, sir. Neither do I admire those masculine women to whom you allude; but I do not include Miss Talbot amongst that class: I meant that she was no flirt, or coquette, or lover of frivolous amusements," explained Colonel Gower.

"Who the deuce cares what you think, or what you mean?" snapped Mr Tempest, whose toe was giving him some particularly sharp

twinges. "I don't mean to be rude, Lennox—but this cursed foot!—you'll care neither for the strong-minded or the weak when you've got the gout: I could swear at my best friend with the greatest pleasure just now!"

"Swear away, sir, if it relieves your toe—I don't mind it in the least," replied the Colonel laughing.

Mr Tempest groaned audibly, and rang for his valet. The man came.

"Here, Clayton, I want these bandages looking to: wheel me into the next room," said the Squire.

"Nothing of the sort, Mr Tempest, sir: all right, sir," replied the man gravely.

"You think so?" meekly said his master. The valet had disappeared. Clayton revenged the rest of the world by tyrannizing over the old man completely: Mr Tempest never dared contradict him.

"Your horse is brought round—where are you off to this morning?" asked Mr Tempest, after a long pause, as Colonel Gower's groom led the animal past the windows. "You ain't going over to Houghton?"

The officer replied that such was his intention.

"Don't go and fall in love with Semiramis; she won't have you: if the Emperor of all the Russias asked her to-morrow, she'd be wanting to know what his pedigree was, and who his ancestors were at the time of the Conquest!"

"I am perfectly safe on the score of Semiramis," replied Colonel Gower, laughing.

"I'm not sure of that! Men are but men, and colonels are no more; and Semiramis had a voice and a way with her to wile hearts out of bosoms when she was young. She's a fine woman yet — forewarned is forearmed, you know;" and the Squire nodded sagely to his nephew, who leisurely finished his breakfast, and then rose and looked at his watch.

"Not in a hurry, eh? not flying on the wings of love?" asked Mr Tempest, with a sneer.

"I'm never in a hurry, sir; and I'm always in time," returned the Colonel, smiling.

"Say a good word for yourself, man—do: punctuality is one of the military virtues, I dare say!"

"Have you any commands for Miss Talbot?" demanded the officer.

"Tell her she may go to the devil!" sharply exclaimed Mr Tempest, grinding his teeth at the gout.

"Anything more, sir?"

"And stay there!"

"Is that all, sir?"

"The sooner the better."

"Nothing more? Have you any commands to send by her?" asked his nephew, with a countenance of the greatest gravity. Mr Tempest looked up.

"The fellow's laughing at me, I declare! Never mind, sir, you'll live to have the gout yet: you old generals and admirals always have; and there'll be some scamp of a nephew to make game of you, then. Be off, do!"

Colonel Gower laughed, and left the room.

"If that crack-brained nephew of mine ain't bound on a fool's errand, I'll be shot. Yet I don't think it is Semiramis after all!" soliloquized Mr Tempest, when he found himself alone. "Oh, this cursed gout! I wish it were sunk. There's some courage about him: he

aint a Miss Nancy, silly sort of chap; but they're all fools in love every one of 'em: not a man in the world is worth a button to anybody but his mistress when he's in love! I hope it ain't Semiramis—she too old. There's that Simpson, he ain't got the gout, and he's older than I am. Bless me, after all there's some comfort in being a poor man—poor men don't have gout."

The door opened, and Clayton came in.

"Oh, Clayton! I'm very bad this morning; are the papers come?"

The valet replied in the negative, though he had been for the last quarter of an hour reading the "Morning Post!" It could not be reasonably expected that the master should read the news before the man; and seeing that was all Mr Tempest wanted, he shut the door noisily, and returned to the housekeeper's room, to finish the perusal of the interesting article from which the ringing of the bell had disturbed him.

"Bless me!" recommenced the old man, querulously; "one may do a deal for a man without making him grateful. Clayton is

very short this morning: now I know the papers *are come;* but how dare I say it? I'm at his mercy. The ungrateful dog; he knows I'm used to him, and can't do without him. When I gave him that little annuity, I thought I'd bought him for life; and now, if I make a bit of a remark, he tells me he ain't a slave, and looks as if he'd be off next minute. Ugh! the graceless brute!"

While the poor old squire was bewailing his fate, his nephew was leisurely riding across the Chase, on the very disputed right of way which had raised so much ill-blood between his uncle and the Lady of Houghton. Colonel Gower had made no attempt to effect a reconciliation; for he knew Mr Tempest's aversions were always in extreme, and Miss Talbot was not quite the person whose sore points a man would willingly tread on. Thanks to his forbearance from this topic, and his own high character, he had established himself on a sufficiently intimate footing at the Priory, before he had been in the country a month. For once Maude Talbot was short-sighted as to what was passing before her. It scarcely

could be called carelessness, for she was glad to let her sister have so unobjectionable an escort in her rides and walks. So never a day passed, but on one plea or another Lennox Gower found his way up to Houghton, and spent an hour or two in Lettice's society. Maude was herself at the time much occupied; Mr Wylie's visits to the Priory were long and frequent, and Miss Sedley's delicate health prevented all long rambles, in which Lettice delighted.

Thus it happened that they were thrown much together, without the restraint of a third person's presence. In their rides Saunders followed at a distance, and in their walks they were always alone. Such frequent companionship, as was but natural, only increased the passionate attachment which the two had begun to feel for each other, at their very first meeting after Lennox Gower's return from India.

The young officer was, however, much too highly principled to endeavour to fetter Lettice Talbot by an engagement, young as she was, and devotedly as he saw she was at-

tached to him. He resolutely kept aloof from so dangerous a subject; but by every other means he made himself an indelible interest in her heart.

Lettice made no confidante: she was sure he loved her; but he never told her so; and therefore she considered that it was wrong to speak, though she longed to make her sister a partaker in the joy she felt. This silent dwelling on the cherished idea sank it deeply into her mind, and made her set a double value on the love which, for some reason or other, displayed itself only to her. Colonel Gower had thought, whether wisely or foolishly we cannot take upon ourselves to determine, that he ought, in justice, to let his love lie untold, until Lettice had made an essay of the perils and fascinations of a season in town. He would not owe her affection to her want of knowing others to compare him with: he would be preferred before others. Only too happy in her present tranquil state, Lettice left the future to take care for itself, and gave up her whole heart to its enjoyment of the new passion.

Maude attributed her gaiety to her youth and health, was glad to see her so happy, commended her strictly to Lennox Gower's care, and let them go their own way, while she went and shut herself up in the Oriel-room, and talked law and business with Mr Wylie.

Thus it happened day by day. The time for Lennox Gower's departure for Scotland had been repeatedly deferred. In such a pleasant state of things it was hard to tear himself from Houghton altogether. What might not Christmas festivities and that redoubtable London season bring forth, inimical to his dearest hopes? Yet he must, in honour, leave her free. She could not but know how well he loved her; and he had faith in her love. Yes—surely the woman could not forget whom the child had so faithfully remembered. He would leave his fate undetermined, unless any other person seemed likely to gain the prize which his pride forbade him to ask of her inexperience.

Saunders was leading Lettice's pony backwards and forwards before the house when Colonel Gower rode up, and the young lady

herself appeared at the open door immediately. She had seen him riding up the Chase, and had run down to join him. No instinct of coquettry ever prompted her to change her mind if she had appointed to ride with him at a certain hour; and she was now quite ready and eager for the exercise. Colonel Gowr e dismounted to assist her: when he was present, he never yielded to any one the privilege of placing her in the saddle; and Lettice asserted that nobody else could assist her so skilfully.

On this particular morning, her face was radiant with youth, health, and happiness; she had her brightest smiles, and her merriest laugh for the occasion. Colonel Gower asked her what was the cause of her high spirits. Lettice looked at him in amazement.

"Nothing; only I am happy. It is a positive joy to feel alive on such a morning!" she said, laughing. "You know I have not a care in the world. Surely never any girl had better cause to look gay, and you ask me why I am so! Don't you remember when you were a boy, feeling luxuriantly contented, fearlessly

happy? Well, just so do I feel now. Can you wonder?"

"Will you have a canter across the grass?" asked her companion for reply.

Lettice put her pony to its speed. Surely nothing could be more lovely than that young face shaded by a broad hat, the long golden ringlets floating on the wind, the soft tint of rose on the cheek, the clear lustre of the dark blue eyes, and the smile hovering on the curved lips.

Colonel Gower could remember nothing so fair in the shape of woman, and he half repented the promise he had made to himself not to bind her to him by an engagement, when he thought how many aspirants to her favour she would have when once launched into society. Perhaps some one bolder and less scrupulous might step in between them: but no!—he would trust her. It was not, however, without a sigh that he introduced the main subject of his morning's reflections: namely, his departure from the neighbourhood. When they took a gentler pace, on entering the bridle-road through the wood, he broached the subject.

"Lettice, I leave for Scotland to-morrow," he said, not attempting to disguise the reluctance with which he made the communication.

"To-morrow!—so soon?" exclaimed Lettice, turning her face to him, as if she would ask him to remain yet a little longer.

"I have been here a month: it seems but a few days," said her companion.

"Shall we not see you again? Are all our pleasant rides to end with this one?" she asked.

"Lettice, I trust not!" he replied, warmly. "Oh, no! we will have many more, if it please God! I shall be here again soon after Christmas. My dear little friend must not think she has got rid of me yet: I hope to tell her often again how very carelessly she holds her reins," continued the Colonel, assuming a gaiety he was far from feeling.

Lettice tried to laugh too, and corrected the fault to which he alluded. "You have not my improvement much at heart, then, really," she said. "But here comes one who

will always keep me in mind of his master, if I should be disposed to forget him."

Rouser bounded down the path to meet them, followed by Geoffry Meynell and Aaron Lee. The two men touched their caps, and passed on; but Rouser, having obtained a sight of his mistress, was not to be coaxed to leave her. He rushed round and round them, barking, in his delight, with might and main. When his glee became less obstreperous, the conversation was resumed.

"We are going to Dalston Crags after Christmas," said Lettice. "Maude says the house has stood empty for years, and that it is a shame to neglect it. It is a beautiful country, she tells me: I have never been there. It is a primitive place: not a visitable creature within ten miles. But I always loved the sea, so I shall enjoy it: though dear old Houghton is home, after all."

"Dalston Crags—a strange, wild place, I dare say: that part of the coast is romantic in the extreme," returned Colonel Gower, not, on the whole, sorry that his fair friend was

going to spend part of the interval before he should dare to claim her, in so quiet, and, consequently, unobjectionable a part of the country.

The woods, at that season of the year, were in their richest beauty: the foliage was of every tint, from the yellow of the horse-chesnut to the ruddy brown of the beech. Lettice always had a keen appreciation of the varied beauties of nature; and this particular wood-path was her favourite ride or walk in all seasons. There were deep, shady glades, opening between the trees, whose leaves, in summer, almost shut out the sun, and made them cool at noon-day. In autumn, when the branches were less luxuriantly clothed, the beams pierced through, and made a checquered, wavering network of light on the grass below. In spring-time, these glades were bright with the yellow daffodils, and wild, white anemone, and the purple hyacinth, of heavy, sickly fragrance. Later in the year, the tall foxglove rose up from the tufted mounds, and the ragged-robin grew richly about the roots of many a patriarch of the

forest. Truly no birds in any wood in England sang more sweetly than the birds that built their nest in the Nunswood of Houghton.

Lettice told her companion many of her pretty fancies about this wood; and everything she told only displayed to him the more how pure, how loving, and how religious in its bent was the mind of the young creature he ventured to hope would become his life-long treasure.

"You have never been with me to the Nuns' Well: you must go!" suddenly she exclaimed, breaking off in the middle of the history of a thrush which she had brought up and afterwards turned into the woods, and whose note she imagined she distinguished from all others.

"I have never been there at all; we must certainly go," returned the Colonel.

"We have passed the road, we must go back; it was the last opening. Further up into the wood we shall cross a brook, and soon be there. It is not a mile off. Oh! it is so sweet, so pretty!" said Lettice.

When they reached the Nuns' Well, Colonel Gower's appreciation of the spot was equal to all Lettice had hoped: he had never seen anything more peacefully beautiful. The well was almost in the centre of a hollow, round the edges of which the wood grew close and tall; the sloping ground was carpeted with velvety turf, and the rude stones that arched over the water and the steps which led down to it were covered with brilliant moss.

There was a huge elm at one side of the hollow, with seats under its spreading boughs, formed of the bases of pillars and fragments of some old building: legends said it had been part of a monastery destroyed at the Reformation, when the church lands of Houghton Priory were sequestrated, and afterwards bestowed on the Earl Talbot of Hardwicke and Old Court, for some services rendered to the state. There was, besides, a rude table formed of blocks of stone that had evidently formed part of an arch, with a slab for a top, which the village gossips maintained to have been the altar of the chapel.

"Where, I wonder, is Mr Warburton now," said Lettice to herself, as she preceded Colonel Gower up the narrow path which led from the main track. The recollection of his broken promise to go there and spend a day, long ago, just flashed into her mind.

As they issued out into the more open part of the wood, Saunders, who had not chosen to follow, hastened up to them. "I'm afeard, sir, we are going to have a storm," he said to Colonel Gower.

"True! The darkness seemed nothing more to me than the thick branches which quite covered the path. Lettice, we must hasten home."

They reached the Priory before the storm broke, but not before Maude had had time to feel exceedingly anxious for her sister. She came down to meet them in the hall, and pressed Colonel Gower to remain to luncheon.

Lettice told her this would be his last visit to Houghton for some time.

"Then you must stay: I can take no excuse. We shall miss you exceedingly. Go

into the drawing-room and see Miss Sedley, whilst I make this girl change her dress. Come, Lettice.

The two sisters went up stairs together. Maude would have left Lettice to Aimée's care, and returned to the Oriel-room, where she had left Mr Wylie, but Lettice enticingly put her arm round her neck, and begged her to go into her room to talk a little bit—they so rarely had pleasant chats together there, for that odious business.

Maude yielded, and Lettice had her chat; though its results were not what she could have wished.

Miss Sedley's embroidery had, for some years, given place to a coarse kind of knitting—neither better nor worse than rough blue yarn stockings, which found grateful wearers amongst the old people of the village; with whom, by means of her kindly ways and unostentatious charities, she had deeply ingratiated herself. The old governess, for she looks old now, was dexterously guiding her long needles through the intricate operation of taking off the heel, when Colonel Gower

entered the drawing-room. She lifted her eyes, nodded slightly, and then went on till the difficult bit was finished; then she dropped the stocking on her knee, held out her hand, smiled, and spoke.

"I could not lay down my knitting in the middle of that taking off the heel, Colonel Gower, for king or kaiser," she said, in explanation of the cavalier way in which she had received him. "There are certain positions in which one never willingly abandons labour: it is easier to work than rest. You found me in one; but now I am at leisure to talk and to be talked to. How does your pupil progress? I hear you found several faults in her way of riding. Is she timid? careless?"

"Neither the one nor the other, now," replied Colonel Gower. "She is graceful, charming, feminine—all that a woman should be. Did I find fault with her style? There is nothing to amend, if she could always be preserved as she is."

"In perpetual youth!" exclaimed Miss Sedley. "I did not think you capable of expressing such a wish. To remain childish, inex-

perienced, while we all grow old! Believe me, Colonel Gower, you would soon cease to desire it. The merry ways that are so engaging would pall on your fancy: you would look for deeper feelings—for sedater happiness. Her youth would weary you, if you could not share it and be young too."

"It could not!" answered Colonel Gower, suddenly; then checking himself, he walked to a distant window, as if he feared he had already said too much and betrayed himself.

Miss Sedley looked after him. She was not blind to the love that had been growing up between her dearly-loved pupil and the young officer. It was all that she could wish. All that Lettice's gentleness and goodness deserved, they had won. To Miriam Sedley's ideas there was nothing surpassing the happiness of having won the love of an honourable man. She took up her stocking, and knitted on mechanically, thinking it over.

Miriam Sedley looks now quite old. She has a cap of delicate lace over her grey hair, which is neatly smoothed away from

her high white forehead; her eyes now are not ashamed to accept the aid of spectacles, and her thin features, while becoming even sharper, have acquired a certain look of rest. Her dress is of a sober grey tint, of some soft material; and comfort, rather than fashion, is consulted in its make. Altogether, she has the air of a lady-like, contented person, who has met with storms and shipwreck on her life's passage, but who has come into still waters at last, and who is thankful for the haven gained so late.

Metaphor apart, the grave, elderly woman, while looking back on the day-dreams of youth, and the sinful regrets of maturity, would not change either: she does not mock at the folly of the first, or blush for the ridicule of the last. What she has felt, hoped, and suffered, nobody has known: her life has been truly a life within itself. There may have been a sanctifying, ennobling influence in her hidden love—she thinks so now; only sometimes she wishes that *he* had been happier in his: she wonders if, in the busy, public life he has led since, any vain longings and bitter

thoughts have had space to creep in, and make themselves heard above the din of action. He is never so much as named amongst them; only, in the papers they learn how, step by step, he has mounted the ladder of power: the abuses he has helped to overthrow, the good he has laboured to do, his success, his praise, his new and honoured name,—all these they know, and all England knows them as well; but it is of the private life, the home scenes, Miriam would ask the history: and they are a sealed book.

Perhaps, if she could see him, she could read in his countenance what she would fain know. It is the first wish she has—to see him again; and while time and grief have passed over her, writing their marks on her face, this wish has lived, and strengthened, and abided its time of fulfilment in patience: this wish is still waiting; and Miriam has grown old, and grey, and dim of sight.

Latterly, Lettice's affairs have occupied her, even to the exclusion of her own selfish wish. She has a great interest in the girl's love being happy; for her wilful pupil is nearer to her

heart than ever was any living being, save Philip.

Colonel Gower had resumed his regulation-face, and had taken a chair opposite Miriam, before she had come to the end of the meditations which his sudden rush to the window had called up. She was made conscious of his return by the disappearance under the table of her ball of yarn, which, with one stroke of his boot, he sent rolling to the other side of the room. She lifted her eyes with a meek surprise, that sent the officer in search of the ball to hide his confusion. He was sure she had found him out; he was quite sure of it: those clear, grey eyes always saw to the bottom of everything.

Before he had recovered the yarn and restored it to its place on the rug at Miriam's feet, he had determined to make a confidante of her—and a friend. It was much easier to make the resolution than to keep it, however, for he was in momentary expectation of the appearance of the sisters; and it seemed almost wrong to disturb the smooth current of the thoughts of so demure and placid a person as

the old governess looked. He hemmed twice; made several remarks on the storm which was scattering the few remaining leaves from the trees; asked who was the happy person for whom Miss Sedley knitted stockings; and just when he had brought his courage to the point, and the confession trembled on his lips, the door opened, and in came Miss Talbot and Lettice.

The calm beauty of the elder sister and the graceful loveliness of Lettice were in strong contrast; the greater perhaps that Maude had the air of being haughtily displeased, and yet resolute in trying to suppress the exhibition of her feelings. Her manner to Colonel Gower had never been more courteous; yet he intuitively felt that he had lost ground with her. Lettice did not seem conscious of anything wrong, and laughed and chattered with her usual wildness; occasioning Miss Sedley to forget where she ought to narrow in the stocking-foot, and once jerking a needle half out of a row of stitches in kissing her hastily to make up for it.

After luncheon the storm cleared off, and

Lettice would have gone out on the terrace for a stroll, but her sister forbade her gently, on the plea that she had a cold.

"A cold, Maude; I never was better in my life," remonstrated Lettice.

"My darling, it is very damp," replied Maude, decisively.

There was no more to be said, and a feeling of restraint began to creep over the party.

Maude remained in the room conversing indolently on various topics of no interest to any of them, until they all began to wish that the *séance* was at an end. When Colonel Gower rose to take his departure, Lettice's good bye would have revealed to him her love if he had not known it before: the farewell was public; but both had faith in the other, and understood all that was unspoken.

Miss Talbot left her sister and Miss Sedley together after he was gone, and went up to the Oriel-room, doubting and displeased. She was beginning to be afraid that Lettice liked Colonel Gower, and that she had been too blind to see it. It was Lettice's regret at his departure, expressed privately to her sister, that had ex-

cited the suspicion; and their manner of parting had but confirmed it. After half an hour's deliberation with herself, she determined to say nothing, lest words might kindle into a flame a spark which absence would probably extinguish.

When Colonel Gower, on his return, entered the room where his uncle was sitting, the old gentleman greeted his grave face with a laugh.

"Down in the mouth, eh? Been catching it from Semiramis, I warrant," he shouted, triumphantly. "Don't attempt to deny it, sir: I know as well as if I'd been there, that you and Semiramis are wishing each other at the bottom of the Red Sea this very minute."

Colonel Gower reddened: that was the very idea in his mind—it would have solved his new difficulty completely; but not feeling disposed to bear Mr Tempest's raillery just then, he muttered something about letters to write; and not heeding his uncle's call that the post was gone an hour since, he departed to his bachelor apartments in the rear of the house, and shut himself up till dinner-time.

CHAPTER II.

DAUGHTERS OF MISERY.

It was not, by far, the most wretched room in that squalid part of the town about St Grim's and Old Court, which the two sisters Nellie and Jessie Jefferson inhabited; though Nellie, when she could afford a moment to look round on the bare white walls, was disposed to feel a repining at the lot which had overtaken them. Before the first month of their occupancy had expired, they had been obliged by degrees to part with all the little articles of furniture and ornament which had at first contributed to give it a home-like aspect.

Their troubles came on them thickly. The first was, that the linen warehouse for which Nellie had been long accustomed to work, de-

clined to continue employing her when the change in her circumstances became known. There was great difficulty in meeting with work at that season, and when she did at last find a person to give her regular employment, it was of a very inferior kind, and miserably paid.

Also when Jessie carried the embroidered dress home one evening to Miss Crookes, she was haughtily received by Bella Grimstone, paid for her work, and then dismissed with the intimation not to call again, as Miss Crookes did not wish to have any further connection with her. Jessie hid her tears and mortification under her black veil, and turned homewards. Nellie consoled her as well as she could, and advised her to apply to Mrs Dawson, who had always been kind to her, notwithstanding her leaving just when she became useful. It was difficult for Jessie to bend her pride to this, but after the lapse of a day or two she consented to make the application. It was successful. Mrs Dawson neither commented on her conduct towards herself, nor

seemed to consider her as in any way responsible for the family misfortunes.

Jessie left her somewhat comforted, and, with two common dresses which had been consigned to her to make, under her arm, she came suddenly on Frederick Linfoot. Into his willing ear all the story of their troubles was poured. He listened eagerly, reproved her for not letting him know sooner, and pressed her to accept some pecuniary assistance from him; this Jessie obstinately and proudly rejected, in a way that convinced Mr Linfoot he was doing his cause an irreparable injury.

Mrs Dawson's kindly-meant work was not, however, destined to profit poor Jessie much. Frederick Linfoot had left her, and she was walking quickly to make up for lost time, when her foot slipped, and she fell. She rose immediately, but she had severely sprained her wrist.

When she reached home, she could scarcely stand, and while telling Nellie of her accident, she fainted. Nellie was alarmed, and begged a woman who occupied the next room to run

for a doctor. He came, bandaged the wrist, spoke lightly of it, and went. For a few days, the sisters cherished the hope that Jessie would be able to resume her work; but the pain, the sleepless nights, and the mental anxiety to which the poor girl was subject, did their work, and a low fever stretched her sick and helpless on her bed.

The two dresses were carried home untouched. Then came the necessity of watching by night, and Nellie's hours of rest were very few. First went the books which their father had delighted in, then the old house-clock, then one thing, then another, till the room was bare. But the rent was duly paid, and the needful doctor's-stuff and nourishing food supplied to the suffering girl. In a fortnight Jessie could sit up by the fire, but her hand was useless still, and her weakness continued. Her beauty had not suffered: it looked more refined, more softened by what it had passed through.

Nellie was now able to return to her toilsome needlework; but the scanty remuneration barely served to keep the wolf from the

door, and there were no more things to be disposed of, except Jessie's gay clothing, which Nellie would rather starve than touch.

Mr Linfoot had inquired after Jessie several times, while she lay ill, but he had not been admitted to see her till she was sufficiently recovered to sit up. He had then appeared touched most deeply by her sorrow, and left early, that he might not fatigue her. He came twice again, and Nellie was almost glad to see him, his visits did her sister so much good; but after that they were discontinued openly, and Mr Linfoot never appeared except when Nellie's absence allowed him to see Jessie alone. Of these private interviews Jessie did not tell her sister, and Mrs Renton's secrecy was probably well secured.

Mr Linfoot had talked openly, before her sister, of his wish to marry Jessie, but he had also hinted at obstacles which then rendered it impossible. The two sisters knew the worst: Nellie had no faith in him or his intentions, and thought that his absence was an indication that he meant to break off the acquaint-

ance altogether, and she could not be altogether sorry that he had come to that determination. We know how she was deceived. On her exertions all must now depend: Jessie was no help.

One bitter day, towards nightfall, Nellie sat by the window, straining her eyes to finish a piece of work that had to be carried home that night, when, by some unaccountable freak of memory, a scene enacted years before on a bright summer noon in a country place, came gliding into her mind:—the bright lady whom she remembered she had envied, and of whom Geoffry Meynell had spoken as bearing a burden heavy as her own, the great Mr Philip Warburton, her grandfather, the cottage garden, the sunlight, the few spoken words—all recurred, life-like, distinct as reality.

Jessie was sitting on the side of the bed, rocking herself to and fro, while she murmured, half aloud, a fragment of a song. She looked dull and spiritless, with a certain listening turn of the head towards the door, which distressed Nellie exceedingly; for she,

in her appreciation of the value of Frederick Linfoot's promises, thought that the girl watched and listened, and wearied in vain.

Nellie herself had grown very thin, but there was no flagging in her energy: she stitched on without stopping, while that recollection rose up before her.

"Yes; I am glad he is gone: it is better so," she said, half to herself.

"What, Nellie?" asked her sister: "who are you glad about? who is gone?"

"Grandfather," replied Nellie. "Think what he would have felt!"

"I always fancy old people take troubles easier than young ones: maybe it is that they naturally don't look to bear them so long," said Jessie, sadly.

"But he was so proud of father! and no more than right, *then*," returned Nellie.

"Oh, I wish we had never come here! Oh, Nellie!" And Jessie laid her head on the pillow, and sobbed passionately. "It is so hard to say God's will be done, in troubles like ours: almost starving, father in prison, and you obliged to work all day, and all night too

often, and me not able to help a bit! Oh, it is very hard!"

"So it is, Jessie, darling; but no doubt this town has a many worse off, who can't get work to do or bread to eat, and are forced to go to the Union," said Nellie.

"Nell! I'd rather do anything—I'd rather die—I'd rather starve outright than go there!" exclaimed the younger sister violently. "Oh! if I thought it would come to *that*, I wish I was in the church-yard this very day: but you don't think it will, Nell, do you?" she asked more gently, peering into her sister's face. "You don't think it will? Frederick would never, never look at me again,—never!"

"Don't set your heart on him, Jessie—don't, my darling! He's not worth you, or he'd not be so cruel as to leave you in this way: he'd be here now, if he meant to keep his word by you; but never fret. This is the time to find out true friends: he's none of *them*, I know."

"There is no need to make me more miserable than I am, by saying that!" returned Jessie querulously; "don't I know how little hope

there is of our ever being what we were again? and don't I know Frederick's ways of thinking as well as you? He loves me, I know,—or at least he did love me afore father's trouble."

"What does he think of father's case, I wonder?" said Nellie sadly.

"Frederick said he would be transported: there could not be a doubt of it," replied Jessie, with a faint blush colouring her cheek.

"Why did you not tell me this before? When did you see Frederick?" asked Nellie sharply, looking up from her work for the first time.

"Don't be angry, Nellie! you look just like father now," said the younger deprecatingly.

"I'm not angry:—who could be angry with you, Jessie?" replied Nellie despondingly. Tell me when you saw him, and what he said."

"He said I might set my mind at rest,—nothing could save him: Mr Wilson was savagely set against him."

Nellie listened so quietly that Jessie thought her sister less excited than she was. Jessie little

imagined that the deception she was herself practising was the cause of a deeper pang than the assurance of their father's fate.

But so it was. Nellie could not help seeing that division was fast coming between them. It was no longer of any use to argue or counsel: Jessie had doubtless chosen her own lot; her sister could but stand by her, and protect her as she might. Nellie dared not look forward to what the future might have in store for them.

The work on which she was employed was a coarse shirt, such as are sold at the lowest order of slop-shops. It was the last of a dozen which she had received a week before,—they were to be carried back that night. Nelly knew what the penalty of failing in time would be—namely, the refusal of any more work. She had besides two or three other things, of which the pay was somewhat better. Altogether, she hoped to receive about six shillings for her six days' labour, and these six shillings had to keep those two girls in food, fire, and lodging, for a week. The last stitch was finished, the bundle made up, and Nellie had put on her

shabbiest shawl and bonnet to carry them home. When she was ready to go out, she asked Jessie if she might tell Mrs Renton to come up and keep her company.

"No, never mind. She always tires me out with her gossip: I'd rather be alone. Kiss me, Nellie, before you go," she said, her manner softening; and when Nellie raised her face she felt a tear on her cheek. She kissed her again.

"Keep up your heart, darling! there are better days behind the clouds: keep up your heart!" she said cheerfully; and assuring her sister that she should not be long away, she started off with her bundle under her arm to be at her destination before the shop closed for the evening.

Nellie had to traverse innumerable narrow, reeking streets before she reached the slop-shop. The lad was just coming out to put up the shutters, as, hot and out of breath, she came up to the door.

"You'd best be sharp, Miss—master's just off," he exclaimed.

Nellie entered, and was roughly accosted by

a coarse dirty man in a white neckcloth, who stood behind the counter turning over a bundle similar to the one which she had brought, whilst a pale, harassed woman, with a baby on her arm and a child of three or four hanging by her gown, stood anxiously waiting for the payment of the work she had just brought in.

"This here won't do, missis," said the man brutally: "you women that have worked in factories all your lives don't know how to set a stitch. I'll give you half-a-crown for this, but don't come about my place any more—d'ye hear?"

The woman would have remonstrated, but he cut her abruptly short.

"It's no use palavering, and telling me about sick husbands and badly bairns: I can't afford to have my work done badly: there are two other shops about here underselling me already, all along of the extravagant prices I give my sewers. Bad sewing don't go down at no price, and I can't do with any more of it; so make way, my good woman—it's no use staying there."

The pale woman pleaded for one more trial.

"It won't do, I tell you: while I'm trying you and others like you, all my business 'll be running round to t'other shops. I ain't a hard man, but I can do no more than I can: here, take your half-crown and be off." He tendered her the coin as he spoke.

"You said three shillings, sir—there's six of 'em, if you please," she said meekly.

"I can't afford more than half-a-crown—your work ain't worth it, and I shan't give a halfpenny more."

The pale woman took the half-crown, and went out into the street.

"Now, young woman, it's your turn; come forward," said the shopkeeper to Nellie, who had remained standing near the door.

There was an impudent leer in the man's face as he looked at her; but she kept her eyes sedulously fixed on the counter, and he took her work, looked it over, and asked her to sit down.

"Thank you, sir, I've a sick sister at home, and I've no time to waste," replied Nellie.

"You'll be wanting five shillings, I suppose," he said, once more referring to the sewing.

"If you look again, sir, you'll see it will be more than that—I reckoned it six."

"Aye, six—six. But, my girl, I can't afford more than fi'pence a-piece for these shirts."

"You said sixpence, sir."

"Well, if I pay you sixpence, you must look out for more work elsewhere: I can't afford to go on at that price. I had got a parcel of lighter things ready, for you're handy with your needle; but if you wont take 'em at my price, I know plenty that will."

Nellie could not hesitate—it was her only bar between starvation. She agreed to his terms, and with the heavy package under her arm, set off on her return home.

It was quite dark, except for the occasional gas-lamps, and there were few people in the streets but those who either had no shelter, or who followed their vocation under cover of the night. Passing under the shadow of St Grim's, Nellie saw a girl hurrying along close under the wall, with a shawl over her head. Something made her, after she had gone past, turn to look; the girl had also turned; but immediately she saw herself observed, she ran

on, and, turning a corner, was lost to view. Nellie paused no more till she reached her home. Mrs Renton was standing at the doorway, speaking to a gentleman. Nellie had scarcely time to see that it was Mr Linfoot before he was gone: he did not acknowledge her, and seemed desirous of not being recognised. Mrs Renton, ready at a lie, said it was not Mr Linfoot, but another person whom she named. Nellie appeared satisfied, and mounting to her room, opened the door and went in.

"I've been longer than I meant to, Jessie; but I had to wait," she said.

There was no answer. Nellie raised the curtain and looked into the bed: no—Jessie was not there. She turned round to leave the room, and inquire of Mrs Renton where her sister was. In doing so, she saw a piece of paper lying on the table, and the ink-bottle beside it: the ink was scarcely dry on it, or in the pen. Nellie's hand trembled so at first she could not hold the scrawl to read it. Presently she saw these words—

"Darling, darling Nellie! I am going to

him—he loves me. I shall not be happy; but it must have come to this at last: we are too young to put up with starvation. You will cry for me, good Nellie; I know you will: but don't come to look after me—it is too late. Oh, Nellie! forgive me."

For some minutes Nellie stood with the bit of paper in her fingers, turning it over and over. She then called up Mrs Renton. The woman told all she knew.

"After you was gone out," she began, "Jessie came down, and she asked me if I'd seen aught of Mr Linfoot during the day. I gave her a bit of paper he'd left this afternoon in the dusk. It asked her to meet him to-night; but the time was past, for I hadn't given her it afore, 'cos you was in the room. When she'd looked it over once or twice, she stood looking into the fire a bit, and I see the tears coming into her eyes. All at once she rushed off up stairs, and after five minutes, she came down again with a shawl over her head, and bid me tell Mr Linfoot she was gone to the bridge: the paper said, if she didn't meet him, he'd come down to-night for her

final answer, for he was not going to be teased no longer. He'd just come when you came in, and I gived him her message."

"You said it wasn't Mr Linfoot."

"I didn't know she'd gone for good; if she is, there's no use mincing matters: she'll be a bonnie sight better off than she was."

Nellie intimated to Mrs Renton that she might go; and, to that worthy's surprise, instead of setting off immediately to find the fugitive, she took off her walking things and sat down by the fire.

"Oh, Jessie! Jessie!" moaned the sister's heart, when she was alone. "Oh, Jessie! I'd have worked my fingers to the bone for you! You shouldn't have starved. I could have toiled night and day for you! Oh, Jessie! if he loves you half so long as I'd have done! Oh, Geoffry! if you knew what's befallen me now!"

Nellie's labour-bought bread was indeed bitter now, and watered with tears: but it passed. She was alone; and as she stitched through the live long day and half the night, her mind hardened, and sometimes a laugh,

harsh, loud taunting, broke the stillness of the room. What could hurt her now?

Surely trouble had exhausted itself. She had nobody to work for, nobody to tend, nobody to love.

And Nellie's cheek hollowed; her eye grew cold, and her lips hard; and her place in St Grim's Church knew her no more.

CHAPTER III.

HONEST AND TRUE.

JESSIE had been gone little more than a week; but that week had worked sad changes in her sister's face. It was a wet stormy night, and Nell sat cowered down over the fire, crying bitterly in her loneliness; her work neglected, and too ill and suffering to care that she had been ordered to bring it back by a certain time on peril of being refused any more: she was thoroughly broken down by her long night-weepings. A friendly breast to lean on and pour out her troubles would have been such a comfort! It was at hand, though she knew it not.

If her ear had been as quick as it used to be, she would have heard the firm tread of

a man's foot coming across the Court and stopping at the door; but she did not, and it came up the creaking stair, also unnoticed. The decisive knock at the door recalled her; she suffered it to be repeated, in the hope that the comer, whoever it might be, would depart; but after waiting a reasonable interval, he knocked a third time. Then Nell got up, crossed the floor wearily, and opened the door. At first, she could not see who stood in the shadow without; but as he advanced a step forward, she recognised him, and started back. "Oh! Geoffry Meynell, why do you come here?" she exclaimed hastily.

"I'm come, Nellie, because I thought I'd a right to come," replied the game-keeper, sturdily. "I've kept away as long as I could, since you bid me; but there is no reason, that I know of, why you should not like to see me: friends are none so plenty, Nellie, that we can afford to lose 'em. Do'nt tell me to go away, Nellie, till I've said my say, for I wont do it;" and having thus announced his determination, Geoffry Meynell sat down on a chair opposite the one into which Nellie had dropped. Then,

it would seem, for the first time, he caught sight of her haggard woe-worn face; for his changed instantly, from the frank heartiness of his greeting smile, to a dismayed and solicitous eagerness. He was by her in a moment, had raised her in his arms, and was gazing sadly into her face.

"Why Nellie, my girl, what's amiss? Oh! if I'd known this sooner, you'd not have been left to yourself so long!" he said.

Nell's tears gushed out afresh as soon as she felt the support of her lover's arm.

"Geoffry! my sister is gone: she has left me. I'd rather have buried her, indeed I would," she sobbed out: "all is so changed with us—with me. I'm the only one now."

"And you never thought of me in your troubles?" said Geoffry, reproachfully.

"Yes I did, I thought of you often; but I did not like to think that you should know what has come over me."

"I not know, Nellie! who should then? Who has such a good right as your promised husband?"

"Geff! I gave you your promise back."

"But it was of no use to me, so I didn't take it, Nellie: don't think I will now."

"Geff, I cannot be your wife: look round and see how I've been living, work and poverty, and half starvation. I'm not your Nellie: I'm quite another woman!"

"You arn't married, Nellie, are you?"

"No Geff. I'm not."

"Then that's all I want to know: my Nellie had red cheeks and bright eyes, and this Nellie on my breast now, has a white face and tears; but its Nellie all the same: I know that, from the little heart throbbing so against my own."

"Geoffry, you might find many girls prettier and better off than I am, and who have not supped so much sorrow."

"They would not be my Nellie, though; and I will have no other: don't try to say you wont have me, for you must. I've made up my mind: the Glen is waiting for you; and then we'll see whether you'll shew this pale face any longer."

"But Jessie! she'll be coming back some night, and she'll find the door shut, and the room dark. Oh, Geff!"

"Nellie, I wont hearken: if she comes back, let her come to the Glen; there's a seat by the fire for her, and bread as long as she will, poor little butterfly: but you are not going to stay here, crying your heart out for the chance of that."

Nellie's denials grew fainter and fainter. It was so pleasant to be there, with her head lying on Geoffry's shoulder, his arm encircling her, and to think that on that honest heart of his, there was rest and repose for her at last.

So one morning, about a week later, there went to St Grim's Church a little wedding party, escorted by as select a troop of ragged urchins and tawdry women as are to be found in that locality. They were not a very merry set of marriage folk, but there was happiness sitting at the two hearts of the lovers. Nellie's face had even in that space got back its fresh tint, and her step was free and light. Geoffry Meynell, it seemed, had been a good comforter.

He told her that evening, when they had reached the Glen, that pretty as it was, it had been desperate lonesome, since she had told

him she would not marry him; but that with her cheery face at the fireside, it would be "Paradise on 'arth;" and Nellie believed him.

And Jessie?

I have no wish to indulge in sickly sentimentalities on her position. She was in the height of her happiness when Nellie was married; but we all know that could not last: we all know to what such as she come, after a space. There is not often a hand held out to save. Those women go over the bridge, and looking back, they see it broken down behind them; ranged on the other side are severe virtue, contempt, indignation: how many can face that fiery trial, and struggle their way again into decent society? Not one in a thousand. Even the innocent—there are some falsely accused—even the innocent, unless they have a heart resentful of wrong and scornful of slight, may turn, and do turn, from the sneer and the hatred which they dare not meet, into the way they loathe.

I have no plea for Jessie, save this—her bad education: there were other things as well, but that is the chief. She had no true estimate of right and wrong: too many in her class are in the same position. On one side, there is a love—temporary luxury—sufficient food; on the other, labour and semi-starvation. Jessie succumbed to her temptation: her strength was not sufficient for the time of need.

There are some women of this day—God will hold them in remembrance!—who do not scorn to stretch out the right hand of fellowship to a sister in misery: who will raise her out of the mire, and give her courage to go forward on a better path. How much purer in the sight of angels must this little body of women be, than those who stand aloof in the complete panoply of virtue, thanking Heaven they are not as others are, and never thinking that the temptation might have been too strong for them, had they had to work for daily bread? Jessie did not blame herself as yet.

He loved her. What matter to her that he was a villain? Was his kiss the less warm, his farewell the less tender to her, for that?

Doubt, mistrust, and desertion, were to come. Her course was that of hundreds: we will not follow it. We will leave her judgment in the merciful hands of Him who pardoned Magdalene.

CHAPTER IV.

MAUDE'S THOUGHTS.

WITHOUT attempting to give the reader a description of the heart-rending scenes in which the principal personages of the story took a part during the winter assize at Salford, it will suffice to say, that all Nellie Jefferson's fears for her father were verified: he was sentenced to be transported for seven years.

As for Winsome Willie, he stood his trial with an audacious firmness, that was not without its merit in the eyes of some of the numerous individuals whom the magnitude of his crime had drawn together to witness it. He had more compassionaters than condemners in the crowded court; and hundreds—not all rude, prejudiced, uncultivated men—went

away after hearing the death-doom pronounced, regarding him as another victim to the game-laws: so prolific in the growth of evil deeds.

They were wrong: Winsome Willie would have been an outcast and a reprobate had no such things as game-laws existed. He stood at the bar of justice, crouching, yet defiant; trembling, yet fierce: the strong physical nature triumphant in the presence of those earnest watchers over the shrinking soul, but ready to succumb before the terrors of solitude and darkness. His muscular, pliant figure, with the strength and activity of ten common men; his countenance, noble in feature, yet savage in expression; the stealthy eye, the sensual lip, the high, broad brow: such was the aspect of a man who had grown from childhood to maturity without restraining one passion for evil, or fostering one impulse for good; who had lived, and would die without a sorrow for past sin, and without a hope for pardon.

Looking up through a sky-light of the court, while the jury were considering their verdict, of which he had no doubt, a dull vague recollection came into his mind of having heard long ago—

how long he knew not: probably when he was a child—that beyond the bounds of this world there is another, which that blue sky represented to him then. Of the nature of that other world he had no speculation: it is all vague, all cloud, and mist, and darkness. There was also in his mind a mocking thought that death is not what—until now that it is so near at hand—he had dared to say it was: that it is not annihilation. There was a fear stared him in the face then, which, but for those thousands of eyes, he would not, could not confront. He was called back from his mental wanderings by the words which told him how soon he must go to prove the philosophy by which he had lived, and would die.

People thought him hard and unconcerned: brave, some phrased it. True, he despised physical pain: what would have made those home-going Christians tremble and quake, had they stood in his place, was a dead letter to him. Hell and heaven were mere names—judgment to come, an unheard of thing.

With his own heart, and the ghostly counsels of the chaplain, passed the remainder of

his days. He went down into his unhallowed grave, in the belief that no account would be asked of him—that he would lie there for ever—that he was one of those to whom nothing but life had been given, and of whom nothing but life could be required. The chaplain said he had never met with a more hopeless subject, and the executioner that he had never known a finer. So much for opinion.

No one but his poor old mother regretted him, and she mourned for him to the day of her death. Miss Talbot, discriminating in her retributive justice, was satisfied at the course the law had taken; but after the act of vengeance was complete, she sought out the bereaved mother in her wretchedness and poverty.

Now, it was a fact that the Lady of Houghton had, in her wrath, made no secret of her hopes and opinion respecting the murderer of old Meynell. These words of hers had been reported to the mother, probably with exaggerated malevolence: at all events, they had reached her ears; and the desolate woman,

in her half-frenzied state, chose to regard Miss Talbot as the sole cause of her son's death.

Maude wished to give her a provision for the rest of her days, and had made arrangements with her steward for the weekly payment of the same; but before leaving Houghton, she wished to see her, and tell her of it, for the accounts which had been brought to the Priory of her destitution and misery were very sad.

Nothing could exceed the wretched aspect of the cottage into which Maude's visit took her. Cold as was the weather, the grate was empty, and the poor mother sat crouching on a mattress, scarce covered with rags, her eyes hollowed with weeping, and her cheeks ghastly with hunger and cold. She did not notice Maude's entrance; taking the comer, probably, for one of those kindly neighbours who had of late ministered to her wants. Maude came to the bed side, and asked her how she did. The old woman looked up with a wild stare, that made Maude move a few steps farther off, while she explained the object of her visit.

She was listened to with silent scrutiny, and the crazed eyes never once wandered from her face. When she ceased speaking, there was a pause. Maude would have spoken again, thinking she had not been understood, but a gesture of the old woman checked her.

"So, so!—you are the bonny leddy wha hunted the widow's son to death! and you come wi' the price o' his blood to his mither!" she exclaimed in an exalted tone, raising herself as she spoke, and laying her skinny hand on Maude's wrist.

Maude would have withdrawn it, but the lank fingers tightened round it with the grasp of a vice, while a hysterical sort of laughter burst from Nanny's lips.

"I've been wearyin' for a sight o' ye: and its bonnie ye are—right bonnie ye are, my Lady of Houghton! But I will none o' your gifts—none of 'em: ye shall have of mine, though! I gi' ye my curse, bonnie leddy—the curse of the poor, and the widow, and the childless! and it shall be on you till men shall not know which has suffered maist—the braw leddy of the Priory or the ould widow at Hillside. There

shall nane o' your bluid, and nane o' your kin, be left to bury ye! Ye shall be alone, as ye ha' made me! Ye hae my curse! and now, begone, or I may do ye a harm. Out of my sight!"

Miss Talbot left the cottage, saying to herself that the woman was mad, quite mad, and must be looked after; but those words had left an unpleasant oppression on her feelings. She was not superstitious, but she had a fear lest God, who had known all her revengeful thoughts against Will, might suffer his mother's curse to come upon her.

In her solitary walk home, she had time to think of these things: to think not only of them, but of others, against whic the outcry of her conscience could not be silenced. There was no justice in the hard rule which she permitted to be exercised over her tenantry; no law to take out of her hands the responsibility of those hundreds of neglected beings who grew up from bad children to bad men upon her property. She was not prepared to render an account of her stewardship: of all the visionary schemes of her brilliant and

happy girlhood, none had ever become more than visions.

From time to time a gush of the old generosity rose up in her heart; but a visit from Mr Wylie invariably overset her scheme, whatever it was. He had inoculated her with an idea that the poor are the natural enemies of the great; that they are, without exception, cunning, ungrateful, and envious: in consequence, only fit to be dealt with by one who knows their ways, and is prepared to resist their encroachments. He persuaded her that the more she did for her people the more she would have to do: that they would never be satisfied —and so she ended by doing nothing.

During their residence abroad it was no hard matter for Mr Wylie to rule things with a high hand; but after Maude's return she looked closely into her affairs, and revived some of her old plans for improvement. Mr Wylie was cautious and subtle: he contrived to bring quietly under her notice one or two flagrant cases of the ingratitude and ill-conduct of persons whom she had directly benefited. Maude was disgusted, and ceased to mention

the necessity of schools and better cottages: anything was good enough for such graceless creatures. Then Mr Wylie brought under consideration plans for the improvement of her property at Houghton and Dalston Crags: he raised the rents in almost every case; and, while pocketing a handsome profit himself, he swelled his employer's already enormous rent-roll to a few annual thousands more. Maude could not but think him disinterested, since such were the results; and as no signs of her unpopularity were exhibited openly, she walked amongst her people in the proud delusion that they loved and respected her with a wholesome alloy of fear.

The scene at the cottage had shaken this belief. She had gone thither full of good intentions towards the poor widow; and her charity was cast back in her face with a curse. She had not found, as Mr Wylie said, that money will salve every insult, every wrong, to the very poor. It was not so. She felt sure that this wretched and starving woman would die rather than take a cup of water at her hand. She felt that she had incurred the hatred of a

broken heart: not quite unjustly. She remembered bitter, exulting words, which she had spoken against Will; and she was less astonished at the reception she had had. There was one comfort: the scene had been without witnesses. Nobody had heard the poverty-stricken mother of the murderer bid the proud mistress of Houghton begone; and, as her rapid steps carried her back homeward, she made up her mind that it should remain a secret. Mr Wylie would find out, when he offered to pay the allowance: but he would cite her as another instance of the ingratitude and evil-heartedness of the poor; and there it would rest.

"Only let me get my pet Lettice settled and well married, then I will be my own steward in good earnest," she said to herself.

Had it ever entered Maude Talbot's head to reflect how much of the pavement she had contributed to that place which is said to be paved with good intentions, she would surely have begun to act instead of to plan. Oh! what a wasted life hers was!

That one act—the sacrifice of Philip Warburton, whom she loved, at the shrine of her

pride of lineage—was the hinge on which all turned. That one cruel, hard deed had made wreck of her happiness, leaving her to the selfish regret which will always follow an act of pride which has over-reached itself! From the day when Philip Warburton left her, she had never once thought to marry. He was gone. Every one else, all society was distasteful. She had consecrated herself to Regret and her young sister; she had hardened into an imperious, indolent, miserable woman. She beheld from afar off the man whom she had despised rising higher and higher: not by popular favour, which will buoy up the worthless often for awhile, but by his own noble and good deeds. There was not a man in Europe more honoured, or courted, or beloved. Only *she* had despised him: she of whom none but her immediate circle of poor neighbours and rich friends had ever heard: she had despised him: and for what? for the accident of his birth.

Oh! how bitterly often did Maude herself, after the deed was done, scorn her own short-sighted pride! Think of him she did daily: to love him she had never ceased—never.

Amongst all his devoted worshippers, Philip Warburton had not a more faithful one than Maude. Every step in his career—every public act, however trivial; his comings and goings, all were familiar to her: she followed him through his public life, up to the last step he could attain: saw him ranked as peer, the founder of a new family perhaps, noble even in her sense of the word. And where was she who might have shared his honours and his love as well? In an obscure part of the country, amongst an oppressed and ignorant tenantry, dividing her time between her steward and her young sister; having no higher ambition than to see the one increase her superfluous wealth to greater opulence, and the other united to some scion of nobility of a stock as good as her own. There was the climax of her pride and ambition!

Maude would have hated her folly more could she have known how utterly dead she was in the statesman's heart: she was kept there in remembrance certainly, but not hallowed as a love should be. Philip Warburton still was moved at her name, but it was only

the involuntary shrinking as when one touches a wound. He had had an escape,—how narrow a one he scarcely dared to think. He had loved her—he had mourned her; but love and sorrow were alike past! He had learnt the way in which she had lived since then: how her infatuated pride always hedged her about; and he said to himself that she would have been a clog to him,—that such a woman's narrow mind would have fettered him; and he thanked the fates for the bitter draught they gave him instead of the coveted of his soul. And while Philip Warburton's greatness grew, and he cared nothing for the old dead love, Maude bitterly reproached herself for his sorrow and her own, and kept his memory green in her heart. What a blessed thing it is that we cannot tell the changes which pass in each other's souls! —that we have not the bitterness of knowing we are forgotten whilst we remember!

The road from Hillside to Houghton which Maude took was a mere track over the moor, now bleak and bare under a January sky. There were no outer objects to distract her thoughts. The wide expanse of wold, with a

belt of wood skirting it on the west, and the river winding through the valley, were the only remarkable features of the view. The sky was low and leaden-hued, without a break, and the wind came over the hills with a mournful sough.

With her cloak gathered closely round her, she paced steadily on, her head bent down to meet the blast,—looking neither to the right nor the left, but keeping her vision centred on the times past, which kept her ghostly company in her walks. Thus absorbed, she had not noticed the quick tread of a horse coming up at speed behind her; and it was already several paces in advance on the turf, a few yards from the path, before she was aware of it.

The unusual sight of a female of her appearance crossing the moor alone at that season, occasioned the rider to turn his head; one glance was enough to convince Maude that in the dark, grave-looking horseman she saw Philip Warburton. He did not recognize her; and after the first momentary glance, he trotted

briskly across the moor in the direction of the manor-house.

Maude had him in view a considerable distance—long enough to perceive that he was far less changed than she was herself. His not having recognised her was no cause of surprise: nobody who had known her in her brief, butterfly reign of fashion and indolence, would have recognized in the darkly-clad woman plodding across the moor on a bleak winter day the proud young heiress.

But it was a bitter cut notwithstanding; and the Lady of Houghton had need of all her pride, all her self-control, to bring her calmly and unconcernedly into the presence of her sister.

Lettice met her as she entered the house, and told her in a gush of pleasure that she also had seen Mr Warburton, and asked if it were not possible to delay their departure to Dalston Crags while he remained at the manor-house.

"Assuredly not: we go to Dalstou to-morrow, as it is fixed," was the reply; and without

waiting for any further remonstrance, Maude swept past her sister, and sought the seclusion of her own room.

He was Philip Warburton to them both still; and so he was to one half of the world, though the other called him Lord Elmsdale; and so shall he be to us: the title does not change the man.

CHAPTER V.

DALSTON CRAGS.

On the coast of Yorkshire are many little fishing villages romantically and beautifully situated, but there is not one to rival, for picturesque wildness, the secluded nook of Dalston, commonly called Dalston Crags. It is about three miles and a half from a fashionable bathing-place; but up to the time of which we write, there had been no irruption of pleasure-seeking townsfolk into its solitude. The cottages still wore their primitive thatch, and the idea of a marine hotel had not penetrated the obtuse skulls of their unenterprising inhabitants. It remained for an ingenious land-steward to convert a peaceful country hamlet

on the east coast into "a favourite resort of the county gentry."

When Maude Talbot went down there, to reside for a few weeks with her train, she, Lettice, and Miss Sedley, thought it charming, spite of the unfavourable season; whilst Aimée, Saunders, Johnnie, and the rest, pronounced it the "dowliest" spot they had ever seen. Lettice could not weary of the strolls on the beach in wild weather, and Miriam Sedley had as cosy a nook by the fire, and as coarse a stocking to knit, as she could desire —so she was happy.

Maude, however, wearied somewhat; but a few days after they were settled and had begun to think of the outer world, Mr Wylie came down to Dalston with a plan of the estate, and proceeded to make Maude as *au fait* of its capabilities as she was of those of Houghton. Weariness vanished before business; and in a week from his arrival Mr Wylie had induced her to consent to the building of "a terrace," a first-rate hotel and boarding-house, and various

other tenements, the nucleus of a future fashionable watering-place. The immeasurable benefit it would be to the property and the people on it—the advantage to herself—all were cautiously represented, and Maude was satisfied. When she communicated the plan to Lettice, it was not received so favourably as she had expected.

"Verily," exclaimed the privileged girl, "verily, sister Maude, if Mr Wylie proposed to build a factory here, you would do it!"

Maude laughed.

"Surely I would, sister Lettice, if I thought it would flourish," was the reply.

"What an utilitarian soul! Oh, Maude! no doubt if Mr Wylie were to examine the interior of the earth, he would find iron or coal mines, and he might have people delving and digging below, whilst masons are building up houses above! Then Dalston would grow and grow till it became a great city, and this quaint old house over our heads could be turned into a hospital for the miners' widows, and it would stand amongst the "great unwashed" like Old

Court in the midst of Salford! Give me credit for my thought, Maude!"

"Your mining project may be turned to account, I believe! Don't look so dismal, Lettice. Everything that employs labour increases men's wealth, and in consequence their happiness and usefulness."

"Ah, Maude! you know I never could argue; but if you let Mr Wylie have his own way, we shall never care to come to Dalston again. It is such a sweet spot!"

"And so innocent! ay, Lettice? I will not ask you to come down here again if Mr Wylie converts this into a colliery district. You see I take your raillery in earnest."

"I shall be more cautious how I speak henceforward, for I perceive that I injure my own cause more than I benefit it."

"Speak the word, my darling, and Dalston Crags shall remain Dalston Crags, in all its primitive innocence and poverty, to the end of time, for anything I will do to change it!"

"Nonsense, Maude—as if I could be so selfish! You know better than I do how to profit

the people. Do you think I would keep them back for the sake of a pretty sea-side retreat?"

"No, my darling, I did not."

From that day the project went forward; and when the time came for Maude and her retinue to go on to London, the quiet place had its stillness invaded by a colony of labourers, armed with mallet and trowel and saw, headed by a shrewd London architect, who chuckled in his sleeve at this wise project, and wondered how a far-sighted man like Mr Wylie could have ever formed a plan so likely to result in a failure, and bear no fruit but perhaps a select seminary for young ladies and a few picnics in the summer. The natural advantages of the great watering-place a few miles off were too great to allow it to find a successful rival in an out-of-the-way nook like Dalston Crags. But the architect kept his own counsel: he was working for one individual who had a deep purse, and not for a company, who might evaporate and leave him in the lurch. So his money being safe, he went to work with a will, in that pleasant assurance.

Maude found great amusement in overlooking the marking out of the building-ground, and many of her suggestions had a ready seconder in Mr Wylie's coadjutor. According to the original plan, the old house of Dalston would have lost its view of the sea, and received instead an exposition of the back premises of the projected terrace; but this was no sooner broached than it was negatived. The agent had, indeed, meant to propose that the ivy-decked dwelling should be pulled down; but he was too wise a man to follow out his idea when he had so decided a glimpse of his lady's way of thinking.

Maude herself was born at Dalston, and the notion of destroying the quaint old nest would have been perfectly outrageous.

Mr Wylie silently thanked his stars that he had not made so distasteful a proposition; for, while swaying Miss Talbot in many things of far more importance, he knew there was nothing more unsafe than meddling with her personal likings and whims.

While Maude overlooked plans, tenders from contractors, estimates of building, &c.,

Lettice, shawled to the nose, with her faithful friend Rouser at her heels, made pilgrimages to distant cliffs, which looked grand or bright with a gleam of wintry sun on them in the distance, but faded into dim monotony when she came beneath them. There was no sitting musing under them, listening to the waves breaking on the beach, coining their murmurs into sounds of voices and heart-stirring songs: quick walking was the order of those days; the wind came with a loud wild sweep over the sea, and the billows rolled in with tumultuous swell, bidding her march on—on. Rouser took a mad delight in it all; and appeared to think those crested waves were created for his special amusement; he swam far out to meet them, and came back like a briny god, covered with the chains of his dignity, in the shape of tangle and other sea-weed. Then he deemed it necessary to deposit his ocean spoils at his mistress' feet, and to cover her plentifully with the sprinklings of his favour. At first Lettice chid him for his misdemeanours, but she never could bring him to a sense of his conduct; he evi-

dently thought he was greeting her with delicate attention.

Many a kindly word had these two from the rude fishermen who had their huts close on the shore; the children of the village had assumed the privilege of following her, and making offerings of shells and peebles which were plentiful thereabouts; and some stray coins with which Lettice never went unprovided, always changed hands on such occasions. When Maude appeared, she was always duly honoured by rustic bow and curtsy; but Lettice had a smile and a word from every one. She liked it: these greetings never savoured of familiarity to her. She was beloved; and this was the people's way of showing it.

That bright face, with its sweet tender glances, was named years after amongst those rude people, with a remembrance of her goodness and gentle way to the poor. They kept her memory amongst them, as of a being who had but touched their thresholds, and vanished again to the world from which she had come.

One day, returning to the house from a

long ramble with Rouser, Lettice met Maude going out with Mr Wylie. When Miss Talbot saw her sister, she dismissed her agent, telling him she would follow in a very few minutes, and went back with Lettice into the drawing-room. Miriam Sedley sat there with her everlasting grey worsted stockings, and only looking up slightly to see who entered, went on with her labour of charity.

"Here, my good Miss Sedley, is the wanderer; tell her what we have been talking about. I have not time to stay; Mr Wylie waits." And with these words she vanished.

Now, Maude Talbot knew well enough that the proposal about to be made to her sister, in the matter which she had delegated to Miss Sedley, would meet with Lettice's very decided opposition; and this opposition she wished to have combatted and reduced before entering on the subject herself. There had been a noticeable thing in Maude's training of her sister from her childhood upwards. If any unpleasant communication had to be made to her, any denial of her wishes, any necessary but nauseous draught administered, not from

Maude's lips or Maude's hands came the trouble. She had always, and on system, deputed the disagreeable task to other persons —to Mrs Powys, Aimée, or Miss Sedley. There was this selfishness in her love, that her idea should be encircled in Lettice's mind with a halo of happiness and indulgence : that from her she should receive nothing but what ministered to her pleasure.

Maude had in this succeeded. Lettice was imbued with a firm persuasion that her sister's affection was such, that she could not and would not cross her wishes in any particular. She had a blind faith, a complete, entire reliance on her. Nothing short of Lettice's natural goodness and purity of disposition kept her safe from making selfish demands on this sister's love.

Maude had been clear-sighted here. She saw the nature with which she had to work. She had her reward—verily she had her reward. Lettice was bound to her by the bonds of gratitude and love, a thousand-fold stronger than every other motive combined. From

lavish indulgence Maude had passed to imperial sway over the mind she had helped to form; and all the while the gentle Lettice thought that Maude was turned by her wishes just as she would.

When Miss Talbot hurried from the room, Lettice came forward to the fire, and asked her old governess what it was she was to tell her.

"Oh, my dear! you can read the letter; it is there," replied Miss Sedley, glancing at the table.

Lettice took up the letter, opened and read it. It was an invitation from Lady Linnet, who was spending the winter at Linnet Grove, in the neighbourhood of Dalston Crags, to pay her a visit before their return to Houghton.

"And Maude does not wish to go, I suppose; neither, I am sure, do I. I would not willingly exchange this dull old house and my companions therein, and my pilgrimages with Rouser, for the solemn dinner parties and stately drives in which the Linnets indulge: besides Miss Sara Clare is there, and

I always stood in such awe of her. I remember she pinched me once at church. I am glad Maude had rather not go."

All this Lettice said without doubt and without interruption. Now, however, Miss Sedley spoke.

"My dear," she said, "you are too hasty in your conclusions. Miss Talbot wishes to go; besides, Miss Clare will see the propriety of letting you alone now. I remember that pinch; your eyes often wandered from your prayer-book when it was given: it was probably necessary, but it is long past now."

"Yes, before Colonel Gower went to India," responded Lettice. "But why go?—we are so happy here, so quiet. I don't care a bit for parties and balls: I dread going to London."

"Nonsense, Lettice! Now you do talk like a child. Why should you dread it? You will receive no vital injury, I hope, from a little mixture in society: besides, consider your position. You cannot always wander on the shore, musing romantically, with Rouser for a guard; you must prove the very sea itself.

Surely life's waves will not be so very cruel to a tender thing like you!"

"I know not—I cannot tell. I think of that sometimes. Those same waves roll up to my feet, and break gently in dazzling foam some days; yet I know them treacherous. I see them other times raving madly; and I have heard of boats which were wooed out by them on a fine gleaming morning, sucked down into their angry depths e'er night. Well, we grow metaphorical; don't we? I don't expect that the world is lying in wait like a grim monster to swallow me up the moment I appear; but I think I should flourish better in the shadow of a quiet fire-side. Oh, Miss Sedley! if I had had the fortune to be born poor."

"Well, my dear, if you had? There would still have been perils to dare: perhaps a hand-to-hand battle with the world, from whose smile and caress you shrink."

"No, poor: not hard-working poverty: I don't mean—but a middle state."

"Lettice, dear, why not leave that with

God? He knows, what is best for you. And, to go on with your metaphor of the boat and the sea, leave the helm in His hand, and no matter for the storm by night, or the mist by day. Be easy—He may lead you to a port early. He may let you bear the blast of the tempest, and even let you suffer shipwreck; but trust still: so surely you shall escape safe to land, if you leave your guidance with Him."

"It is cowardly to wish to keep away from possible danger; but I have misgivings."

"Are there no troubles for home-travellers? Is the household hearth indeed a sanctuary, where the grim shadows of anguish and fear cannot come?"

"I don't expect to have no trouble in my life."

"But you would fain avoid it if you might. Oh, Lettice! there is no master like sorrow to bring us near God and near home."

"But I am weak. I feel as if this leaving home, and going amongst strange people, and living as they live, would change everything about us; as if we should come to love each

other less, and ourselves more; as if Houghton would never be the same Houghton to me again that it has been. What is it? Is it a presentiment of evil—a foreboding of trouble to come? Am I growing superstitious?"

"Fanciful and nervous, nothing more. This visit to Linnet Grove will be the very thing for you. There will be young people to prevent you moping alone. I must interdict these wanderings by the sea, or we shall have a melancholy, lackadaisical young lady on our hands instead of a brisk Lettice!"

"Don't, pray don't: I have always plenty to think about. Rouser and I are never dull, never melancholy! We will go to the Grove: but oh! Miss Sara!"

"She will be an antidote to musing."

"You had better prescribe a dose of her to be taken as bitters every morning, to strengthen me for my coming conflict with the gay world."

"So be it! Now, let me knit my stocking-toe: the pair is nearly finished, and you shall go with me to carry them to old Jervis to-morrow morning."

"Has Maude settled when we go to the Linnets?"

"You must talk with her when she comes in."

And they did talk of it that evening; but Lettice, in all the talking, did not discover the true reason why her sister wished to leave Dalston for Linnet Grove: an exchange which she would at most times have regarded as very unpleasant. The truth was, that Maude had that morning driven into the town, attended by Saunders only; and there, lounging under the portico of the chief hotel, she had seen Colonel Gower and some ladies, whom he had introduced to her as his sisters. Now, it was impossible for Lettice Talbot to be at Dalston, and Colonel Gower only three miles off, without meetings taking place. Maude had no certainty respecting their feelings, but she had strong suspicions. She was, however, too shrewd a politician to give these suspicions utterance: she resolved rather to make up in care what had been formerly wanting; and it appeared to her the most feasible plan for utterly dissolving the intimacy, to keep the two out of each other's way.

Lady Linnet's invitation was consequently very opportune, and Maude did not see it necessary to communicate to any one the real cause of her accepting it. The following day Maude and Lettice, with Aimée, took their departure for Linnet Grove, leaving Miss Sedley at Dalston; with the intimation that the visit would not extend beyond a week, when they should return to Dalston.

During that week the Gowers called twice. On the second occasion, Miriam saw the Colonel and told him where they were. He appeared particularly rejoiced, saying that he was going over to the Grove for a few days himself.

CHAPTER VI.

LINNET GROVE.

For some characters, there is no such improver as matrimony; Juliet Clare, from a vain and sometimes ill-natured coquette, had ripened into a staid, yet jovial dispositioned matron, of noble dimensions and agreeable presence. It was a common remark, that she would make three such bodies as that of her liege lord; and it must be confessed, derogatory as it may be to his dignity, that she was in every respect his better half: she had far the larger portion of sense, and double his spirit; and altogether he looked as if he were accustomed to sing exceeding small in the domestic nest; notwithstanding a devouring selfishness, which he had manifested after half-a-year's union.

But it was Juliet's creed that all men are selfish, and that the whole duty of woman consists in keeping them in a state of utter depression : an article of faith which she carried out to the letter. Lord Linnet, therefore, had the reputation of being an easy man, without either energy or sense, and his wife passed for a remarkably clever woman. Their six children, each a step above the other, were exquisitely well managed : it was supposed amongst their juvenile acquaintance, that they could do no wrong, even if they tried—a mistake which the nurses of the young Linnets would have been glad to rectify at any moment, if required.

An abundant fortune enabled the Linnets to keep up a very good establishment; and, with a still undecayed hope of "settling well," Miss Clare quartered herself upon her fortunate sister during her stay in town, and during the winter gaieties of the hunting-season.

It shews what a tenacious quality hope is in virgin bosoms, when we consider Sara Clare verging on forty, still waiting, and still expecting a good match as her undoubted right. Nobody but herself had cherished such a futile

dream for many years. When Ada married Lord Whimper, Sara was looked on as a decided old maid, by every one but herself; and Juliet, while encouraging her delusion with a vain shew of words, contrived to make her useful during her lengthy visits. Never were the little Linnets so demure, so excellent in their deportment, as when under the cold eye of aunt Sara: the crushed look of the two little boys was edifying to behold; even the newest baby sobbed in a whisper when rocked on that chilly bosom.

Ada Clare's marriage was scarcely so successful a speculation as that of her elder sister. Two years of flourishing in London and Paris, with a rapidly increasing family, had reduced the Whimper finances to a low ebb; they having, previously to the young lordling's capture by Ada, been pretty well undermined by the Jews. There was a sudden crash—a loud appeal to Sir James Clare, and a flight, bag and baggage, to the Continent; from which place, no inducement sufficiently strong had been found to induce them to return.

Sara Clare had arrived at the Grove with her

maid, a day before Miss Talbot and Lettice. She had heard there was going to be a great deal of company, and came armed for conquest. Lettice registered in her mischievous brain two or three ideas, which came into her mind when she saw Sara enter the drawing-room dressed for dinner on the day of their arrival, for communication to Miss Sedley on their return to Dalston. Certainly the matured damsel challenged observation. Her tall figure, to which no amount of padding or puffing could give roundness, was drawn bolt upright, and arrayed in a delicate pink silk; a gossamer scarf very ineffectually shading a pair of angular shoulders, and long arms of frightful thinness, bare, except for the massive bracelets with which she loaded them.

All the gentlemen were late coming into the drawing-room, for the hunt of that day had taken them far; but the ladies mustered early, and sat cosily round the fire with the two eldest children, talking them over. Lettice had possessed herself of one of the crushed boys, and was doing her best to infuse a slight spirit of rebellion into his oyster of a mind. Maude, as usual, lay back in a low chair, with a screen

interposed between her face and the fire, taking no part in the conversation; but dreamily hearing whispers of all that passed. There was a Mrs Loftus (née Cecily Dobbs), very great on the subject of children; of which commodity her stock, like that of her quondam rival, was sufficiently abundant. Old Mrs Dobbs was there also with her two youngest daughters, looking particularly tired of her vocation for match-hunting; and too busy speculating on their chances with the unmarried male visitors, to pay much heed to the discourse on teething, measles, and the other maladies to which baby flesh is heir, in which the two young matrons were engaged. Sara Clare endeavoured to engage in a conversation with her little niece, who was sitting on the rug by Lettice, pulling her lapdog's ears.

"Mimie!" said the aunt, leaning over to the child. "Mimie!" Mimie lifted a pair of very round blue eyes, and fixed them on her aunt's face. "Come here darling!"

Mimie abandoned her play, and came to Miss Clare's knee. Sara took her up, and tried to dispose her on her lap in the graceful attitude

in which Lettice Talbot and her companion were placed. Maude could not forbear smiling quietly behind her screen at this little pantomime; the imitation was so complete a caricature. Of course, the child's blonde and ruddy beauty, her fat round arms and dimpled shoulders, made Miss Clare look tenfold more sharp, yellow and faded; a fact of which she was unconscious, for she contrived to keep Mimie in her constrained position till the entrance of the men broke up the circle round the fire.

Maude's eye turned naturally on the opening door; and as they dropped in one by one, some well known, some utter strangers, with their cordial or formal greetings, she only drew a little further back in her chair, and let them pass. There were few people who did not stand in some degree of awe of Miss Talbot: her manners were stately, not to say repellant; she never troubled herself to make small talk. The usual impression conveyed by her style of receiving a new introduction was—"I really do not know why you seek my acquaintance; I have nothing to say to you; I cannot be at the trouble of exerting myself:" an impression

which secluded her very effectually indeed from those pests of society, good talkers; who always, if possible, contrive to fasten themselves on the individual least disposed to bear with them.

Thus it happened, that after the first compliments were exchanged, Miss Talbot was left to her screen, and her silent contemplation of the company. Maude was in such great beauty that evening, that Sara Clare felt bitterly envious, and eyed her with a positive gleam of feline spite.

Lord Linnet, who always hovered about Sara —as helpless men do about their relatives and connexions, because, I suppose, they consider there they have a right to civility—asked her in a whisper, if she did not think Miss Talbot a magnificent specimen of womankind?

"You make that observation, Linnet, every time I see you," said Sara, snappishly.

The poor man, feeling snubbed, and thinking Sara looked particularly ugly and unsocial, edged off towards Lettice Talbot; of whom, being young, he was not much afraid; and as she was petting

his boy, perhaps she might encourage him. Lettice received him blandly, and talked to him more kindly than any young lady had done since his marriage. Gathering confidence by degrees, he turned their conversation back to the Christmas visit to Houghton, immediately after his transformation into a Benedict.

Lettice always liked to talk about that visit, and by some chance, the name of Philip Warburton was mentioned. That name touched Maude's ear, and made her instantly sensitive to every sound: her heart almost stood still when she heard Lord Linnet tell her sister that he was actually staying in the house at the time; and Lettice's face brightened visibly. They came over and told her of it as a pleasant surprise, and Maude bore it bravely and calmly; though wishing herself at Dalston with Colonel Gower even, rather than with that rencounter in prospect. But there was no possibility of avoiding it, and though a cold damp broke from every pore, and her cheek grew visibly paler to Sara Clare's eye, she did not flinch for a moment, or think of pleading sudden indisposition, and so avoiding it. But she could not talk: there was something surging up in her

heart that choked all utterance; and gently waving her screen to and fro between them and herself, she contrived to intimate her indifference to their communications, so Lettice had recourse once more to the boy, reinforced by Mimie, not quite understanding how her sister could be so careless of an old friend.

The next time the door opened, it was to admit Mr Warburton. He came forward into the room, seemingly without noticing the new arrivals, and advanced directly towards his hostess. Maude's face was screened from him; but after a few seconds' conversation with Lady Linnet, his eye caught a smile, strange but familiar—that of Lettice.

"You have a bad memory for old friends," she said, laughing.

Mr Warburton glanced at Lady Linnet, and then, as if suddenly struck with the certainty of his suspicion, he held out his hand and grasped hers warmly. "I see my little friend Lettice," he said. "Little no longer, but much the same nevertheless."

"Always the same! always the same! Maude is here: you have not seen her?"

As Lettice spoke, their eyes had met, and without a moment's hesitation, he crossed over to the place where she sat, and spoke. A few formal words only were exchanged. Mr Warburton drew back to the vacant place by Lettice, and engaged her in a conversation, of which the young lady sustained the principal part, having reference chiefly to the fate of Lupa, her own and her sister's travels, and their plans for the spring. In the midst of a glowing description of Dalston Crags, and her enjoyment there, dinner was announced; Philip Warburton drew Lettice's hand through his arm, to escort her to the dining-room: to the intense vexation of Sara Clare, whose glories had not won her a glance from the man whom she had long regarded as her own peculiar property.

At dinner, Maude and Philip Warburton were placed directly opposite to each other; and each was quietly, at intervals, busy regarding the other. If Maude had blamed herself for having cast a life-long blight on the existence of this her rejected lover, she might safely on that occasion have released her conscience from the burden.

The middle-aged statesman might have been entirely ignorant of all tender sorrows, or regrets, from his appearance. He was still a very noble-looking man, in the hey-day of his fame and success; but no longer the handsome lover who had wooed so passionately ten years before. Maude's presence evidently caused him neither disquiet or longing: he chatted and laughed with Lettice as if they had parted but the day before, and dined as a man at forty loves to dine, with mind at ease. Without being neglectful of his fair neighbour, Philip lost no action, no look of Maude's. He was surprised to see how early the glow of youth had left her: he wondered rather what was the reason of those twitchings of the lip, and the icy coldness of her clear eyes. All her luxuriant tresses were now worn wreathed round the back of her head, and their colour seemed to have deepened; the contour of her neck and face was majestic: Maude was beautiful still, but she had lost that softness and undulating grace which had charmed Philip into love ten years before. He looked and wondered.

After dinner, he returned to the drawing room early; and, having won Lettice to play and sing for him, he sat down in a corner by the piano, and, unobserved himself, let his eyes rest on Maude. Something in her face there was which betrayed past anguish and living regret. What could it be?

"I could have made her happy, if she would have let me," said Philip to himself, after a long contemplation of Maude's face; and, with a half sigh to the memory of old hopes, he rose, and stood by Lettice, turning the leaves of her music at intervals: always, be it observed, in the wrong place. At last Lettice told him of it.

"Ah! Mr Warburton! your thoughts are away, engaged in some noisy debate with the Commons. Please leave my music: I will dispense with your services," she said, laughing.

"I will not be dispensed with; and my thoughts are not so far away as with the Commons. You are not so indulgent as you were formerly, Lettice."

"How dare you claim indulgence? are you not almost a stranger to us? A nice guardian

you have been to me, indeed! never once inquired after me, or seen whether Maude was starving me to death, all these years!"

"Lettice, I never forgot you! I never was ignorant long together even of your abode; but I always knew you were well cared for—that there was nothing wanting on the score of love. Perhaps you may have been so much indulged as to be quite spoiled: then, indeed, I shall regret my remissness. If such be the case, I must write to Miss Sedley for information."

"Ask Maude: it will be a favourable report from her. What nonsense! I am forgetting my seventeen years, and fancying myself back again with Lupa, in the wood. Ah! you are laughing at me."

"No, Lettice. I like those old remembrances too much to laugh at them: there are a few things we put away in a secret drawer of memory, and often lose the key for years. Then, some day, when we have grown dusty with world-travel, some sprite brings it back to us, and we unlock these stores, and turn

them over in the sun, and are mightily refreshed thereby. All my recollections of you, Lettice, are such treasures."

"Why do you never live at the manor-house now? It is so dreary—shut up."

There was a pause. Lettice looked up, and saw Philip eyeing her sharply. Was it possible that there had been no confidence between the sisters on the subject of his love for Maude? Her artless glance assured him there had not, and he gave her his customary reason: that his duties detained him in London the greater part of the year, and that he was not wealthy enough to keep up two establishments, and so he preferred London.

"Yet you are to be found at other people's houses."

"Rarely: very rarely. My presence here is rather a necessity than a pleasure: was, I should say—for your arrival has changed the character of my visit entirely. I have been suffering lately from an illness, for which my physician conscientiously prescribed

complete idleness and rural sports. So here am I, performing a tour amongst my friends in the north, and collecting forces for the next parliamentary campaign. Fortune has chosen to favour me here."

Sara Clare, at this instant, meandered up to the pair, and asked Lettice to play a particular song, which she mentioned. While Lettice complied, the elderly "young lady" kept close beside her, occasionally asking Philip Warburton if he did not think it "a sweet, pretty thing;" to which he assented gravely.

The wise politician, with diplomatic tact, always contrived to keep Sara Clare at a very respectful distance, without offending her. She, meanwhile, considered him a person of very reserved manners, who needed only a little encouragement to induce him to come forward and make her an offer of his hand and honours. For many, many years had this one-sided warfare been carried on, without results; and, from all appearances, it seemed likely enough to last as many more.

Lady Clare herself often said to Juliet it was really a pity Sara should be so blind, for it was plain to everybody but her that Mr Warburton was not a marrying man.

Sara had, from a cosy nook by the fire, watched what her jaundiced mind set down as a regular flirtation between Mr Warburton and Lettice Talbot. After enduring it for a reasonable length of time, she rose up, and, coasting round the tables, taking up albums for a minute each, and dropping a word to one or two of the dozy ladies, she succeeded in "spoiling sport," as she phrased it, by edging herself close up to the piano. After the song was over, she endeavoured to draw Philip Warburton away, by many antiquated lures which he would not see; and, failing utterly with him, she observed to Lettice, she thought her sister looked jaded and pale,—a remark which instantly sent Lettice, full of tender solicitude, to her sister's side. Her object thus gained, Sara got Philip into a chair near one she herself occupied, and there held him in conversation, until the en-

trance of tea and the late-sitting gentlemen released him from bondage.

In the little bustle that ensued, Maude and Lettice escaped; the former sick at heart, and utterly cast down, Lettice greatly exhilirated by this revival of an old acquaintance. The sisters occupied a suite of three rooms—two chambers with a boudoir between: wherever the Lady of Houghton went, her accommodations were always of the best the house afforded. Once in the retirement of their own rooms, Maude, quite worn out with the violent and prolonged self-restraint which she had been so suddenly called on to exercise, cast herself wearily on a couch, and, with her aching head pillowed on Lettice's shoulder, pronounced herself incapable of any further effort that evening. No word of her real suffering ever passed those white lips. Lettice thought she had one of the violent nervous headaches which, for several years, had troubled her; and bathed her temples with eau-de-cologne, and sat by her quite silently.

After this had gone on for a considerable

time, Lettice asked if she might ring for Aimée to come and assist her to bed, where her head would probably be easier.

"No, Lettice; not yet, darling—not yet! Lettice, do you mind my sending you away? I think I should be better alone."

As Maude spoke, she drew her sister closely to her bosom, and looked earnestly at Lettice, as if her question meant more than the simple words conveyed. Lettice was startled at the wild fixed gaze of her eyes, and felt that the hand which held hers burned with fever: her love was instantly alarmed.

"What is the matter, Maude? it is something more than a nervous headache, I am sure. Oh! Maude, are you ill? Don't look so wild!" Lettice could not restrain her tears.

"Foolish girl, I am tired with our journey: and I would fain you were in bed too, for your cheeks are white as death just now. I cannot rest in bed, you know, when these headaches come on; so you must consent to leave me here. Aimée need not come to me when she leaves you."

"Let me sit here beside you, Maude."

"No! no! Kiss me: remember me in your prayers, and good night. Oh, Lettice! your love is a very precious thing to me—what should I do without you?"

"Let me stay here, Maude: it seems you always send me from you when you have any pain or trouble. Ought I not to share all sorrow with you—you who have borne so much for me? Something hurts you now, Maude, more than you have told me. Oh! sister, it lessens grief so to tell it to somebody whom we are sure loves us."

"What do you know of grief? little enough, my Lettice: and God grant that you be one of the very few sheltered from all evil. Some time—not now, a few years hence perhaps—I will tell you what is the secret pain which your bright eyes have espied in my face to-night. There, that is my last kiss for the present: begone; and pleasant dreams go with thee, sister mine!"

Maude turned her face resolutely upon the cushions of the couch; and Lettice, seeing that her persistency would be annoying, went

to her own room, where Aimée was already waiting for her. The Abigail was in a communicative mood, and after a few quiet, unnecessary remarks, which Lettice scarcely heard, she launched into the information which she had been longing to impart ever since she had received it. Her young mistress was seated in a bergère by the fire, while the maid unwove the long plaits of her hair; so that, curious as Aimée was, she had not the opportunity of observing how it was received.

"There is more company coming on Friday, Miss Lettice, and where they will put them, I can't tell," she began.

Lettice murmured that she really could not either, without understanding exactly what her maid had said; for she was pondering anxiously on what Maude had been saying a few minutes before.

"Colonel Gower and his two sisters are coming (Lettice gave a joyous bound): I thought you might like to know Miss Lettice."

"I am very glad, indeed, for there is no-

body here yet who suits me at all, but our old friend Mr Warburton. I am sure I shall like the Miss Gowers," said Lettice, gaily; feeling such a flood of happiness gush into her heart, that nothing but the certainty of teasing Maude prevented her from rushing back into the boudoir to spread the glad tidings, which she was sure would recover her from the severest nervous headache with which mortal was ever afflicted.

"My sister will be charmed by the intelligence you have brought, Aimée: but she must not be disturbed to-night," said Lettice.

Aimée was guilty of making a slight grimace behind her mistress: she pushed out her nether lip in a way that expressed a very decided dissent from her remark concerning Miss Talbot's gratification at the coming of the Colonel. As Lettice did not see it, and would not have comprehended it if she had, she remained in her comfortable delusion; and when Aimée had left her, she indulged in a shower of pleasant tears:—all emotions dissolved themselves into tears with Lettice Talbot. It was late before she slept: but all her

thoughts were full of contentment; and when slumber fell on her eyelids at last, there came dreams born of the same spirit of joy, to shorten the night.

Her first visit in the morning was to Maude; whom she expected to find pale and tired, and still in bed. To her surprise, Maude was up and dressed, and received her with a great deal of gaiety. Lettice expressed her astonishment.

"I am in my right mind again, now," said Miss Talbot laughing: "last night I was ill. I am growing fanciful, I think, of late. We must live more in the world, Lettice: we shall, by-and-bye, when we go to London: it is not good to mope at Houghton long together."

"Who do you think is coming here on Friday? such a nice surprise for you!—guess!"

Maude guessed several of their mutual friends without guessing right.

"Well, then, is it Mr Tempest?" she said laughing.

"Very near, Maude—Colonel Gower."

Lettice was so glad herself, that she did not perceive the cloud which for a moment oversha-

dowed her sister's countenance. Maude would have preferred hearing an announcement of a visit from the uncle rather than the nephew, under the circumstances. But as it was impossible to leave Linnet Grove within the week which she had promised to remain, without giving offence to her hosts, she suppressed the impatience which the failure in her scheme of separation occasioned: but she determined to keep Lettice so well in her own company, during the time they were in the same house, that Colonel Gower should have no opportunities of prosecuting the siege which she suspected him of laying to Lettice's heart.

It was a particularly bright morning, and warm too, for the season, when the two sisters went down into the breakfast-room; where they found all the gentlemen in hunting costume, except Mr Warburton. He was standing alone by a window, reading some letters which the post had just brought in. Lord Linnet handed two or three to Miss Talbot, and one to Lettice from Miss Sedley. Maude's were from her steward and the architect employed on the terrace, &c., at Dalston Crags; Lettice's con-

tained all the little details which it was her delight to exchange with her former governess: the health of Rouser—who had been left behind, Lady Linnet not patronising huge pets of his kind—the weather, the ailments of the old women, and the clever feats of the small children in whom Lettice took an interest.

By the time Lettice had finished her somewhat lengthy epistle, Mr Warburton had disposed of his correspondence also, and he came and took a vacant place beside her at the breakfast-table. He looked with some curiosity at Maude, who was standing chatting with an air of exuberant gaiety (forced, it seemed to Philip Warburton) with Mrs Loftus. Maude bowed to him with lofty self-possession as she caught his eye, and gave him good-morning in a cheerful voice. It was more than he could fathom: last night's depression, this morning's gaiety. After a few seconds' cogitation, he set it down to the common capriciousness of woman, and the peculiar caprice of Miss Talbot, and turned to Lettice; who wore a puzzled look, with a wavering dawn of intelligence in her eyes, which made her feel

somewhat shy of Mr Warburton. She began to connect him in her thoughts with her sister's trouble of the preceding night, and to experience a slight resentment against him: she coloured under his glance, and spoke much less freely than she had done. Philip sighed and chipped an egg: "Verily," said he to himself, "the ways of women are past finding out." In his own mind, he was convicting Lettice of a changeable temperament like Maude's.

Mrs Loftus and Miss Talbot—than whom two more dissimilar characters could not exist—remained in close conversation during the time the gentlemen were mounting for the hunt, and watching them from the windows. Sara Clare possessed herself of Lettice, and put one arm round her in quite a juvenile way, to prevent her being absorbed by Mr Warburton, who hovered round her after breakfast as if he had some word for her private ear. If such were the case he was obliged to reserve it, for Sara clung to the unwilling girl most pertinaciously; and when the last of the scarlet coats had disappeared, and the ladies turned to look for

in-door amusements, Mr Warburton had left the room. It was easy enough then, to get rid of Miss Clare, and Lettice went off to their boudoir to answer Miss Sedley's letter.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ACCIDENT.

LETTICE had been writing about a quarter of an hour, when a step in the next room, and a sigh, heaved as if from the uttermost depths of an oppressed heart, warned her of her sister's approach. Maude started as she entered the room: she seemed disconcerted at finding her sister there; and, immediately assuming a smile to cover her annoyance, she came forward and bent over Lettice's shoulder to see what she was doing.

"They said you were with Mimie in the nursery, and here you are scribbling letters to Miss Sedley; you are much more conscientious on that matter than I was, I am afraid:

Mrs Powys had to wait weeks for a note during my absences," said Maude.

Lettice asked if she had any message to send; and receiving an answer in the negative, went on with her epistle, and completed it hastily, seeing that Maude, for some cause to her unknown, found society irksome and annoying. When it was closed and sealed, she rose, and, putting away her desk, prepared to leave the room.

"I shall go out and ramble about the grounds for an hour, Maude—it looks so bright and enticing," she said, as carelessly as she could; though her heart was wounded at being shut out from her sister's confidence.

Maude made no effort to detain her; she only gave her warning to wrap up well, which Lettice promised to do.

Maude seemed relieved when the door closed after her, though her conscience smote her for her coldness.

"I will make it up to her in love some day," she said, to quiet it: as if those small slights of tone and manner could be atoned for by after kindness.

Maude did not wish to be alone for any particular purpose which she had to execute, but merely that she might yield unobserved to the wildly-repentant feelings that had been flooding her heart since the meeting of the night before with Philip Warburton.

His indifference, his perfect self-possession, had stung her to the quick. They shewed her that he had dispensed with all gentle memories and all passionate regrets ; they proved her to be utterly powerless over the strong mind and noble heart which once she had spurned, and which now were free from her toils. She had pictured herself as being stored up in the most sacred niche of Philip's memory : looked back to as a bright divinity, and still worshipped from afar. Her cruel and selfish love had taken pleasure in this imagination of her power ; and her mortification was intense at discovering that these fancies of hers had been as unreal as shadows in the water : that, while she still revered him, he regarded her merely as an acquaintance, whom he could meet after a ten years' separation with-

out joy, and leave on the morrow without regret.

"And yet he knew that I loved him," urged her tenacious recollection of their last interview at Houghton: "he might have understood that, having refused to give myself where I had given my love, because he was my inferior in birth, I should never give myself to any one without; and such love as mine comes not twice in a lifetime. I see it now—all my cruel selfishness, all my arrogant assumption, and I feel astonished at the meanness and folly of my prejudices of class. What am I? and what is he? Oh, bitter, humiliating comparison! He may, he must, look upon me as a mere butterfly of fashion, the victim of caprice and pride: and well he may. All my absurd, boastful professions of the good I could do, of the reformations I could work in the condition of my people—what have they come to? A few paper plans, and a world of discontent. He must despise me: he must think of me even more meanly than of Sara Clare: she does good in her own peculiar, unloving way; while I do none."

In reflections and self-reproaches such as these, an hour was soon gone; but Lettice did not come back.

The tread of a horse on the gravel below the window drew Maude towards it, and looking out, she saw her sister talking to Mr Warburton, whilst a groom held his horse ready for him to mount. After exchanging a few words with Lettice, he grasped the bridle, sprang into the saddle, and laughing gaily at some remark of hers, trotted swiftly down the avenue. Lettice, instead of coming into the house, turned back to the gardens to continue her walk.

Maude watched the retreating figure of Philip Warburton till it was lost to sight; and then she sat down by the fire with her head leaning on her hand, and a dull ache at her heart: she had often felt it, years ago, but time had eased the pain somewhat, until this revival of passionate feeling brought it back. With a woman like Maude, these softened trains of thought could not last long: as she sat there alone, the folly, the self-degradation of yielding to them, impressed her strongly.

"Ten years! how should a man care for anything after ten years of life, such as his has been especially? Probably he has forgotten that he ever loved me; or remembers it but as a silly passion which was disappointed and ridiculed by its object, and of which he has come to be heartily ashamed. What man of forty but is ashamed of his unfortunate loves. Yet Philip was not like other men; is he so now? Oh, I think not! I think not! Foolish! What did I think of Annie Carey? Am I less sad, less faded, than she was, when in my young arrogant spirit I derided her as old: a shadow of past beauty? No; I know I am the same as she was then: that I look proud, stern, pale, and have nothing left but the memory of beauty. Yet I presume to wonder that Philip is indifferent: as if he should recognise, in the passionless pallid face of eight-and-twenty, the glow and happiness of eighteen. No; it is impossible that he should: the Maude Talbot of then and now are different beings. I cannot recognise myself often in the mechanical statue which I call myself. If I could rest! but I have never rested since—since I thought I

could live alone, and be content. What an idiot I am to drivel on in this way! I am disgusted, wearied of myself! Poor people need not envy the rich their wealth: nothing could comfort me so much, now, as having to toil hard for a crust of bread for the morrow's meal: it would turn my mind from its absorbing and useless regrets: in working, I should have less time to feel!"

Ah, Lady of Houghton! many a poor heart, in the cottages abouty our stately home, has ached, and hungered, and striven, in far more real woe than yours—only you knew it not, you never saw it. No white lips ever asked food of you, and asked in vain! no child has perished lingeringly by starvation before your eyes! you have not been the widowed mother of one son, and had him devoured by the rapacious maw of human justice! you have had no "little ewe-lamb," banned by the watch-dogs of society, and driven forth into the world to die by the wayside out in the night! There are many, many chapters of earthly suffering which have never been scanned by your experience, and never shall; yet your burden may

be heavy in the heat of the day: and is, as God knows. Who shall help you to bear it?

It is no uncommon idea, though surely an erroneous one, that the poor, the "lower orders" as they are called, have a set of feelings provided for them of a less sensitive nature than those with which the more favoured of fortune are endowed. It is true that the poor talk more of their losses, their sufferings by death, and other visitations; but it would be wrong to argue therefrom that the pain endured was not as acute as their richer neighbours would experience under the same circumstances: rather be it thought that the habit of communicating trouble, and seeking sympathy and kindness from their fellows, was not yet worn-out amongst the vulgar; untrammelled as they are by those restraints of society and public opinion that bid the upper classes suffer in silence, or incur the penalty of ridicule and contempt. Who that has gone amongst "the common people" but has known instances of prolonged self-denial amongst them, such as would find few parallels amongst the Lords of the soil? No one can think that

souls of coarser mould were given to the lowly than to the noble, by that impartial and just God in whose sight all men are of one clay.

Such was not, however, the opinion of Maude Talbot; nor is such the opinion of hundreds of her class. It would have been a moral impossibility to convince the daintily-nurtured Lady of Houghton, that Nellie Jefferson the needle-woman, the child of a convicted felon, endured as strong a mental agony at parting with her lover Geoffry Meynell the gamekeeper, as did she herself in that morning's solitary reverie in the boudoir at Linnet Grove. Not that such a case proposed itself to her mind: she was quite ignorant of all that related to her former tenants; and no idea of anybody else's troubles penetrated the misty selfishness of her reflections. She compassionated herself as the victim of ill-fortune, whilst she scorned herself for repining at her neglect; and she might have gone on much longer cherishing this unhealthy frame of mind, but for an incident which aroused her, rudely and painfully, from the weakness into which she allowed herself to sink.

Maude had not quitted her seat by the fire, but still sat there ruminating, and had done nothing but think since Lettice went out, when she was made conscious of something extraordinary having occurred, by an unusual bustle on the lawn fronting the house. She rose and looked out of the window, but could only see three labouring men going round to the back of the house, and a groom holding a horse, which she recognized as the one Mr Warburton had ridden that morning. There were several people under the porch of the house, but she could not see them, and they were too distant for their voices to be anything but an indistinct murmur.

Fixed to the spot by the apprehension of some calamity, she saw the groom mount the horse he held, and ride at speed across the park; yet she dared not move to go and inquire what had happened. Two voices talking together softly in Lettice's bedroom, gave her courage at last; then tottering across the floor, she threw open the partition-door, and saw Lettice standing, pale and distressed, with her bonnet, which she had just taken off, in

her hand; while Sara Clare, with a startled and excited expression, was talking hurriedly to her. The instant Sara Clare saw Maude Talbot, without noticing her very evident suffering, she broke forth afresh,—

"Is it not shocking?" she began: "Oh! dreadful! Such a terrible loss to the country—to all of us—such an excellent, such a useful person!"

"What has happened?" asked Maude, impatiently.

"Did you not see him carried across the lawn? Such an awful sight! I trust I may never behold such another: it is quite too much for my nerves; they are altogether shaken: I shall not be well for several days."

Maude turned to her sister, her white lips murmuring something that was inaudible. Lettice was inexpressibly shocked.

"Miss Clare's fears exaggerate matters, Maude," she said, soothingly.

"No, he is dead! I am sure he is dead!" persisted Sara, shewing symptoms of becoming hysterical.

"Who is dead?" gasped Maude.

"Mr Warburton!" half shrieked Sara, in a sort of paroxysm, which cast her prostrate on a comfortable couch, where she sobbed much at her ease.

"No, Maude! Mr Warburton's horse fell with him, about two miles away, and he received some severe injuries; but though he was brought here insensible, he is not beyond hope, as Sara Clare says. The doctors have been sent for."

Maude took her sister's hand, and drew her into the boudoir, closing and locking the door after them. Still standing and looking steadfastly into Lettice's eyes, she spoke:

"Lettice, you will not betray me! Every minute of this suspense is agony! Go—ask, listen—do anything, only find out how Philip is. I dare not go myself; but you can:—now go!"

She pushed her towards the door communicating with the corridor from which opened the other chief sleeping apartments of the house: one of these, at the further end from her own rooms, was occupied by Philip Warburton. From the heavy tread of feet on the staircase, she knew he had already been carried thither.

Lettice went out instantly to do her bidding, but the corridor was empty. Stepping lightly, she came close to Mr Warburton's room, and heard the confused murmurs of low speaking voices within. She remained there for ten minutes or rather more; and then as nobody had appeared from the room whom she could question, she went back cautiously. She found her sister standing at the door, which she held slightly ajar, her head bent down in the attitude of listening. Maude allowed Lettice to pass her, and the npressing her hand on her heart, paced rapidly backwards and forwards for a few seconds. She then paused—startled.

"They are coming, the doctors, Lettice; go back, sit in the bay window beyond his room at the end of the corridor, till you hear something: do not come back till you have spoken with somebody!"

The crush of gravel under carriage-wheels close below the windows of the room, announced that Maude's quick hearing had not deceived her. Then there was the quiet professional step of men accustomed to death-

chambers; the opening and closing of a door, and silence.

Lettice had taken her station where Maude requested, so that no one coming from Mr Warburton's room could pass down stairs without being seen. The minutes that elapsed from the entrance of the doctors, before the butler who had helped to carry Mr Warburton to his room came out, were not more than five; but to Maude they seemed like hours. Lettice intercepted the sleek respectable servant as he was about to descend the stair, and asked him how Mr Warburton was: whether he was still unconscious.

Maude, standing at the door of her own room, distinctly heard his whispered reply.

"Mr Warburton has not spoke, Miss. The doctors are going to bleed him: but it looks like as if it would be of no use."

The butler went on his way, and Lettice hurried to Maude. She found her no longer standing to listen, but cast upon her bed, her face hidden amongst the pillows, and her whole form convulsed with strong agony. Cau-

tiously her sister closed the door, and locked it against intrusion. She then sat down on the bed, holding Maude's hand in hers; not teasing her with any expression of hope, which neither felt; nor striving to intrude into the sanctuary of the heart, which, but for this accident, might never have revealed itself to her. For upwards of an hour neither moved.

Lettice then detected the sound of the doctors' steps amongst others coming along the corridor. She rushed to the door, and softly opened it; not venturing to force all those men going away from the sick-room, but hoping there would be some straggler from whom she could obtain immediate information for her sister. After the souud of descending steps was gone, she looked out into the corridor. There was a servant of the house standing at the door of the room, and a strange woman appeared swiftly and silently, Lettice was beside them. "Tell me how he is?" she said, in an eager whisper.

"His life hangs on a hair," said the stranger, (a hospital nurse, whom the doctors had brought with them); and she shut the door

in Lettice's face, for fear of any demonstration that might infringe on her authority.

"Do you know anything, Jane?" she asked of the damsel who was retreating, loaded with the nurse's travelling gear.

"I heard the doctors say, Miss, as nobody must be let go nigh him but Mrs Frost: that is, the nurse they brought, Miss; and that he must be kept very quiet and low, and there was a chance of his getting through. They said, Miss, he had got a—(it was a very hard word, I can't remember it)—but no bones is broke."

With this meagre information, Lettice returned to her room. Maude was sitting on the bed now, watching for her entrance. Lettice hastily communicated what she had heard.

Maude shook her head sadly. "Lettice, I have no hope! Lettice, you cannot know what Philip Warburton has been to me! Do not wonder at my wild conduct: I was almost beside myself! Keep my secret, as you would keep one touching our honour. Oh, Lettice! I never thought to shew to you—to any one—

this coiled adder in my heart; but it has been too strong for me! Come, and sit down: I owe you an explanation for bearing with my violence. I would still bespeak your forbearance."

Lettice sat down beside her; and, interspersed with many passionate self-reproaches, and some agonizing anticipations, she heard the whole story of Maude's first, only, and rejected love. It was a new page of human experience offered to her perusal; and her eyes were so dim with tears for the suffering and faulty sister, who was unveiling her secret thoughts to her, that she did not discern any of the pride and selfishness which had wrecked Maude's happiness.

More dearly than ever did Lettice love her sister now: more closely than ever did they cling together. This confidence was a bond of union: they knew each other's hearts the better for it; and, somewhat relieved by this outpouring, Maude rose up, dressed, and prepared to join the other company assembled in the house, with a countenance which should tell no tales of the morning's occupation.

So well did she act her part, that she listened to Sara Clare's minute details of the accident without any loud expressions of sympathy, and without a tear—a hardness which caused her to be stigmatised by the spinster lady as a "very unfeeling woman;"—"but," added Sara, with pride in her discernment, "I always knew she was: I was always sure she had more head than heart! Poor things who are all heart, like me, suffer so much more acutely than those iron-souled women!" This observation was addressed to Captain Loftus, and elicited nothing but a grunt, which sounded disapprobative; and Sara was silent for the rest of the dinner.

CHAPTER VIII.

PHILIP AND MAUDE.

THE following day, the report of the physician was very unfavourable. Violent concussion of the brain was the consequence of the injuries Mr Warburton had sustained in his fall. For many days he continued in a state of unconsciousness, and then came a season of raging delirium.

All the visitors, except Miss Talbot and her sister, left Linnet Grove. Sara Clare averred that the knowledge of any person suffering so near to her always had a bad effect on her nerves; and, on this plea, she accompanied Mrs Loftus on a visit to a neighbouring great house, where the gaieties had experienced no interruption from the inopportune illness of a guest.

All the young Linnets, with their nurses and governess, were packed off bodily to Sir James Clare's; and Lord Linnet, after the lapse of a day or two, followed them. Poor Lady Linnet would have been left quite alone in her deserted house, but for the offer that Maude Talbot made to remain with her; an offer which was most gratefully accepted.

It would have been impossible to induce Maude Talbot to quit the Grove whilst Philip Warburton was there, hovering between life and death. Juliet attributed this willingness to remain to an old liking for herself, which she imagined Maude to have felt; though probably no such motive entered her brain when she mentioned her desire to prolong her stay. Of course, with so distressing an illness in the house, the projected visit of the Gowers was deferred; a circumstance which delighted the elder as much as it disappointed the younger sister: for Maude thought that the liking of Lettice for Colonel Gower was yet of so light a nature, that the new sights of the approaching season in town would wear it out.

The time of anxiety which these three wo-

men passed through during the month that followed Mr Warburton's accident, was terrible to one of them, and very distressing to all. Maude looked haggard and pale: sleepless nights, or broken slumbers harassed with bad dreams, and days of forced calm with wearying dread of the issue, did their work.

It was no use saying to herself that Philip Warburton living, or Philip Warburton dead, were the same to her: that there flowed between them an impassable torrent: that nothing could alter their relations to each other: —she knew he never had been indifferent to her, and that he never could. The idea of meeting him some day, of being held dear in his esteem, had been silently cherished, but too sacredly, to be cast out and forgotten easily: it had been cherished in vain; but the hope was not dead even yet. In her day-dreams she still pictured herself restored to the throne of his favour: still queening it sovereignly in his heart. But the picture had a reverse; and the reverse was the sober fact, while the fancy-wrought creation on its face

was but a mirage, which vanished before the touch of the real.

He love her again! he esteem her! Never! said harsh Judgment. But "Hope told a flattering tale," that it *might* be; that it was in the chain of possibilities, though probability could not acknowledge it. Then spake up aloud Experience: There was no shadow of tenderness in his manner; there was nothing whereby, remembering his love, you could say that such things were: there was a cool, gentlemanly indifference, far more impassable than vindictive resentment; a cheerful ease, which the aspirant never wears in the presence of a mistress. Be quiet: do not make yourself ridiculous. He has put away the memory of you amongst the other failures of his youth, with which man buys my lessons dearly: they are thickly overlaid with dust, do not stir it up; it hides nothing but the white skeleton of his love. Better he should go on, regarding you as proud and capricious, than that he should find you a suppliant. A suppliant! Yes, Maude Talbot! though your lips would, to their last breath, deny the accu-

sation, your heart asks a little love, for pity's sake, and its long faithfulness: And as his asked, and asked in vain, so shall yours!

Yes: Maude judges rightly; but she still dreams—what might have been, but never shall. Lady Linnet finds Lettice far the more cheerful companion of the two, and drives her out every day in her little pony carriage, while Maude sits in the bay window of the gallery, listening for a voice which hurts her when she hears it, and making friends with Mrs Frost, to talk with her about her patient: in whom the masculine and not-to-be-put-down nurse is mightily interested since she has heard what a great man she has got into her clutches. (The nurse thinks he may perhaps get her a good appointment in one of the great London Hospitals—the height of her ambition. She had rather, as she was often heard to say, be a nurse at St 'Tholemy's than be the crowned king on his throne.)

It was not difficult to win a way to Mrs Frost's good graces, rough as was the rind in which they were enclosed. She had a vast respect for the "real Quality;" and she

was pleased to assert that, if ever she saw the woman that shewed blood, that woman was Miss Talbot. Like most worthies of her class, she was not above taking a douceur in the execution of her duty, so that Maude had no difficulty in obtaining hourly information of the progress which Mr Warburton made. Mrs Frost shrewdly remarked to herself—I must do her the justice to say she never retailed her suspicions—that Miss Talbot lived on her words: when the report was favourable, Maude's spirits rose, and she would even go out into the grounds and walk for an hour, and come back looking quite refreshed; but if it were bad, she would sit in the gallery window, or shut herself in her own room, with a face haggard and miserable.

During that long illness, the alterations were daily; and, with the hand-to-hand struggle with death which was going on in the house, there could be no rest for any long time together. Even on the jovial countenance of Lady Linnet the anxiety was beginning to have a sobering effect: there were actually times when she preserved a silence for even ten

minutes, and then a sigh would heave her expansive bosom, as she remarked on the slowness of Mr Warburton's recovery, or wondered what her six children and her husband might be doing at the moment.

There was one circumstance attending the illness which puzzled Maude exceedingly, and that was the non-arrival of Mrs Warburton during her son's danger. Three weeks had elapsed, and at the end of that time Maude resolved to ask her hostess if she had heard from, or had written to Mrs Warburton.

Lady Linnet positively turned white with self-reproach.

"My dear Miss Talbot, I never once thought of her!" she exclaimed. "What a shocking oversight! How shall I ever excuse myself? Happily Mr Warburton has never been in such a state that his mother could have been permitted to see him had she been here. One never sees her in society. I actually don't know her; and never recollected that my unlucky guest might have any ties closer than one's self. The existence of the relatives of public men is apt to be overlooked, if they are

not of our set. I do not suppose that anybody thought for a moment of acquainting Mrs Warburton with her son's accident. Unless it has found its way into the papers, she is still, no doubt, quite ignorant of it. Do, my dear, tell me how I must extricate myself from my awkward situation. It is inconceivably annoying."

Maude suggested that it would be well to write immediately to Mrs Warburton, and give her every detail, with the favourable opinion which the physicians had that morning promulgated.

"But, my dear, I do not positively know in what part of the world she may be residing at this time;" replied Lady Linnet, disconsolately.

"She was at Leamington when we came here; so Mr Warburton told me the first evening at dinner," said Lettice.

"But, how to write? how excuse myself for so unpardonable, so unfeeling a neglect? Do, my dear Maude, do take upon you the task of communicating with Mrs Warburton; your

intimacy and former connection warrant it," pleaded Juliet.

Maude was very unwilling to charge herself with such a business; but at the reiterated request of Lady Linnet, she was prevailed on to do so. In the letter she wrote, she endeavoured to soften the intelligence for the mother, the loving mother who was to receive it; but all her efforts could not prevent her own anxiety as to the ultimate issue of the illness from betraying itself. "Up to that time, nobody but the physicians or nurse had been allowed to enter his room," she wrote; "but a few days would make a considerable alteration in his state: all excitement had been carefully kept from him, and everything promised a restoration to health; though a lengthened period might intervene before its re-establishment."

On the third day from the despatch of this letter, as Maude sat in the boudoir with Lettice, a travelling carriage with four post-horses rolled up to the entrance-door; an elderly man descended from the dickey, and assisted a lady to alight, whom Maude imme-

diately recognised as Mrs Warburton, aged as she was, and overcome with her hasty journey and its cause. Lady Linnet was out driving, and Miss Talbot was hesitating whether to go down and receive Mrs Warburton, or to await some message from her there, when her hesitation was speedily terminated by the throwing open of the door of the room, and the appearance of Mrs Warburton, whom Aimée had, at her request, brought to Miss Talbot's apartments.

The unhappy mother tottered rather than walked into the room, and with hands extended, asked after her son.

Maude hastened to assure her of his daily improvement; and, for a while forgetful, the one of her son's wrongs the other of the presence in which she stood, they talked together like two women who had a common interest. Mrs Frost came from her post by Philip's bedside, and was questioned closely by his mother of his state. Her replies were so far favourable, that Mrs Warburton was considerably comforted; and to Maude's relief, after inquir-

ing how the accident had happened, she did not allude to the time of its occurrence: thinking probably, that, the information having been forwarded to her, the accident had taken place more recently than was the case.

The following day, with the permission of the physicians, Mrs Warburton was admitted to see her son. His emaciated appearance shocked her excessively; and the explanations which had been deferred, were obliged to be gone into: the task fell on Lady Linnet, and not on Miss Talbot. Though she gave no utterance to her feelings, Mrs Warburton was deeply wounded by the forgetfulness of the people who had surrounded her son in the time of his danger: he might even have died without seeing her.

Philip Warburton, after his first interview with his mother, appeared to regain strength rapidly. She sat with him daily for hours, taking the place of Mrs Frost, to that worthy's utter discomfiture. Mrs Warburton was gravely polite towards her hostess and Miss Talbot; but the cordiality of her first greeting had quite disappeared. The memory of all her son

had endured for Maude, had come back with bitterness, when she found that in his peril, she, his mother, had been forgotten, whilst the woman who had caused the greatest sorrow of his life, was privileged to remain near him. Mrs Warburton's coldly courteous manner soon gave Maude to understand the light in which she regarded her; and pride coming to her support, with its tardy help, Maude smothered her anxiety, and one morning quietly told Lady Linnet that she should return to Dalston the following day. Lady Linnet remonstrated, but in vain.

Maude had heard Mrs Frost say that the next day Mr Warburton was to be allowed to leave his room; and she had no wish for a second meeting: it was painful to go; but it would be miserable to stay.

The carriage, therefore, was ordered at noon, and stood ready at the door to convey them away. It was necessary to bid a civil adieu to Mrs Warburton before their departure; but she was in her son's room. As they went into the gallery with Lady Linnet, who was gaily reproaching them for abandoning her just when

her unlucky guest would require the most amusement, the door opened, and the old lady appeared.

"Miss Talbot, Miss Lettice, will you not see my son before you go?" said she; "he is anxious to thank you for the interest you have felt in his recovery."

To Lettice the stiffness of this speech was nothing: she did not know Mrs Warburton; but Maude felt annoyed; and, drawing herself up in her most frigid way, she followed Mrs Warburton into the room.

The ghastly appearance of Philip Warburton half frightened her. She paused a second, and looked at him. He smiled wistfully, and answered her gaze with one more kindly than he had bestowed on her when they had met before; but his expression only had the effect of chilling the warm emotion of pity that was gushing up in her heart.

The tears stood in Lettice's eyes as she came forward to bid him good-bye.

"What shall I bring my little favourite from Madeira?" asked Philip, gently pressing

her hands between both his, and holding her for a few minutes.

"Are you going to Madeira? Who goes with you? I am sure you want some one to take care of you. Do you accompany Mr Warburton, ma'am?" asked Lettice, hurriedly glancing from one to the other.

"No, my dear," replied the mother; "no, I do not: Philip will not hear of my taking so long a voyage for him, though I would rather go than remain alone without him. He will not be long absent, I hope."

"I shall come back very soon, indeed, depend upon it. But you have not told me what I am to bring you—come, what shall it be?" and Philip shook the little hands he held compressed in his.

"Bring back your old self, safe and well; that is all I ask: and let us see your face at Houghton sometimes," replied Lettice, gaily.

Maude's face, before pale as marble, flushed crimson as her sister spoke, and Philip raised his eyes to hers. She drew up haughtily, with a curl of the lip that conveyed to both mother and son an impression that she was quite in-

different as to whether he returned at all or not. Philip sighed to himself at the short-lived gleam that flashed into his mind with Lettice's words; and, with another gentle pressure, he dropped her hands.

"It is a kind wish, Lettice: I may perhaps gratify you. I am glad to know you still keep me kindly in remembrance. Good-bye—good-bye!"

They were out of the room, and descending the stair-case, with those words still in their ears; Maude thinking how their hands had not met, even at parting—how she had repelled the questioning look, which asked so clearly if her heart echoed her sister's wish—how her sneer had denied the flattering hope which had just awoke in Philip's.

Ah, Maude! but for that curl of the lip, you might have won back much of former happiness. Philip was longing to forgive you—to love you.

He has dared to put a meaning—the true meaning—on your lingering in the house where he lies ill. When he heard steps in the corridor, he distinguished yours amongst them, for

he heard it often pause near his door; and then his nurse disappeared, and of the whispering voices outside, yours was one. He has thought over all your good; he has laid away all your evil; and you are brought once again into the inner sanctuary of his being. Had you but known how near that coveted good was in your grasp, could you have so quietly cast it from you? No! no!

But it is done: the deed is done. There was a revealing in that brief look, which has given you some comfort. You wish you had shaken hands; that you had parted as friends: you know you have wounded him again; that you leave him with a disappointed spirit. You promise to be more just when he returns: when he comes to Houghton, as he half promised Lettice.

When he returns! Who says he shall return? What is that prophetic fear, Maude, in your soul, which makes you turn your eyes up to the window from which he may be watching your departure? Do you think you have looked your last, and that ungently, on the face of him whom you love? There is

nobody looking from the window, but Mrs Frost; so, if you would, you cannot repair your last coldness: you must wait till he return—or till you meet face to face in the land beyond the flood of time.

CHAPTER IX.

NEVER MORE.

WHEN Miss Talbot and her sister returned to Dalston Crags, it was about the end of March. They found Miss Sedley and Rouser in good health and spirits, which their arrival increased.

The terrace and magnificent hotel, which were to raise Dalston from the rank of fishing village to the dignity of fashionable Spa, were already shewing a promising front to the sea. The architect talked largely about the number of applications he had had for possession of the houses as tenants; he confidently predicted that the new town would flourish and become great: but, for the sake of his common sense and his experience, we will imagine that

he made a mental reservation on the subject. The terrace and inn were to be ready for occupation by June; but the fact was, that as yet but one house had been taken, and that as a private residence, not as a lodging establishment.

Mr Wylie fled the scene: he began to fear the speculation would prove a failure, so he left the architect to lie *ad libitum*, and put his trust in the chapter of accidents to find occupiers for the dwellings which he had induced Miss Talbot to have constructed. The natural advantages of the town three miles off, were too great, and its celebrity too widely diffused, for them to find formidable rivals in the rurality of Dalston.

Maude Talbot believed what the architect was desirous she should believe; and, in the firm conviction that she had bestowed a lasting benefit on her birth-place, she returned to Houghton with her train in the beginning of April.

Since leaving Linnet Grove, Maude had received no information respecting Mr Warburton; and, when settled at the Priory, she be-

gan to feel her anxiety too painful to curb any longer, so she sat down and wrote to Lady Linnet.

Three weeks elapsed, and there was no reply. Maude wrote again; still no answer. May began, and they went up to town; Maude thinking that her letters had either miscarried or been delayed at the Grove during temporary absences of Lady Linnet, and forgotten.

It was with considerable uneasiness that, on the following day, when she called at the Linnets' house in Grosvenor Street, she heard the family were not expected in town until the next week. Maude drove to Sir James Clare's.

Sara Clare only was at home. Though Maude's object in coming was only to hear news of Mr Warburton, she could not approach the subject easily with Miss Clare; and after all suitable inquiries and compliments had been exchanged, there was a pause, which Sara Clare broke with a most lugubrious accent and countenance:

"My poor sister,—is she not to be pitied, detained in the country so late? Such a dull

winter she must have had: but she is released now, I am happy to say," she said.

"How is it? you surprise me. Has Lady Linnet suffered for her assiduity to her sick guest by being ill herself?" asked Maude.

"No, Juliet is very well, I believe; but you know Mr Warburton has had a relapse."

"I was not aware of that," replied Maude faintly.

"Yes, indeed, and a most severe one: the physicians were greatly alarmed for his life; but he is so far recovered as to go to Southampton, and I believe he sails for Madeira this week. What is to-day—Thursday? Yes; Juliet wrote me that he would sail to-day, and in pleasant society: the Loftus people are to go, if Captain Loftus is not a few days too late: which is not quite impossible, for he is never in time for anything. But here is Juliet's letter: you shall read it and see what she says for yourself."

Maude's fingers quivered as she took the letter and turned to a window to read it, to conceal her face from the keen eyes of Miss Clare.

"Dear Sara,

"You will be charmed to hear that I am at last released, and shall be in town next week, when I hope you will join us in Grosvenor Street. Linnet and the children have returned home, and I am once more surrounded with family cares and comforts, all the dearer for their exile.

"My poor guest is gone at last. Mrs Warburton travelled with him to Southampton, and he leaves for Madeira next Thursday, in the "Regent." The Loftus people go in the same ship, if they can be ready in time. I should not be at all surprised to hear of Mr Warburton's death, he is so very much altered. He is a man we could ill afford to lose, as papa says: I hope he will come back, if it be only for Mrs Warburton's sake. What an admirable woman she is!

"Have the Talbots come up to town yet? If you see Miss Talbot, will you communicate to her the difficulties I have been in, as an apology for my not answering her last letter?

"During Mr Warburton's illness I was most uncomfortably situated: he was de-

lerious many days, and at those times his most frequent wish was to see Maude Talbot. It was quite sad to hear him: his poor mother was almost heart-broken; but she would not have her sent for, though I did suggest it. He recurred to her so frequently, I presume, because she and Lettice went in to bid him good-bye the same day on which he had a relapse; and the tenacity with which he clung to the idea was singular. Sometimes he thought she was there, and he addressed her as his ward; sometimes he talked quite unintelligibly about her when I saw him —which was not often, you may be sure.

"When he was convalescent, he manifested a disinclination to hear her name, and Mrs Warburton desired me not to mention it, as it seemed to excite him. The physicians also prescribed quiet. I flatter myself that I succeeded admirably as nurse, reader, and general attendant, during the three weeks he remained to gain some strength after his second attack of fever: for Mrs Warburton was laid up with anxiety and want of rest.

" They left the Grove three days ago. Mrs Warburton intends to stay at Leamington dur-her son's absence: she is quite an excellent woman, and charming too, considering how little she goes into society."

The rest of the letter was mere family details, Mimie's infantine disorders and suchlike, which Maude did not read. That part which related to herself and Mr Warburton she read twice over, and then, carefully and slowly refolding the letter, she returned it to Sara Clare; whose inquisitive eyes could detect nothing of the expected emotion in the grave face which was turned full upon her.

Sara pronounced her a perfect piece of adamant.

" Very sad, is it not?" said Sara solemnly, desirous to hear some expression of feeling from her visitor.

In her anxiety to escape suspicion of being in any way attached to Mr Warburton, Maude rather over-did her coldness and indifference. Sara Clare began to sneer at her mentally, as

a very bad actress, and to think her the victim of a hopeless passion which tried to shroud itself under a mantle of carelessness.

With mutual feelings of dislike, Maude took her leave of Sara Clare, and during a long drive into the country, she indulged her bitter and self-reproachful thoughts, wishing—none but herself could know how ardently—that she had left Philip, when they last parted, with less coldness and less pride.

The few succeeding days passed over without anything occurring to break their monotony to Maude. To Lettice, everything was new, noisy, and disturbing; and the night of her first ball was destined to be one of excessive misery, notwithstanding the presence and devotion of Colonel Gower. Lettice had been enjoying several dances with him, and some conversation in a smaller room opening from the ball-room, when she saw a gentleman enter the room, whisper to another, and then, with faces of consternation, both left it again by a door opening on a staircase, which led away from the rooms where the guests were assembled.

"Who are they?" asked Lettice.

Colonel Gower mentioned two names which Lettice knew only as those of debating M.P.'s.

There was a pause in the dancing as they returned to the ball-room, though a brilliant waltz was being played; people were whispering to their neighbours, and many were looking very shocked.

"Something must have happened," said Lettice; "let us seek Maude."

They came suddenly on Miss Talbot, standing in a recess with the Duchess of Netherby and two other ladies. The Duchess was evidently agitated; Maude stood like a statue, her face ghastly, and her lips pressed together. When she caught sight of her sister, she advanced a step, and laid her hand on her arm.

"Perhaps," said one of the two ladies, a stout dowager, "perhaps this report may be false: reports of these kinds of things are always abominably exaggerated."

Lettice looked frightened and puzzled. The second lady volunteered an explanation, which Maude listened to as if it were confirmation strong of the terrible news which had reached her a few minutes before.

"Claridge has just come in, and he says there is telegraphic news of the wreck of the "Regent," in which Mr Warburton sailed for Madeira. It was burned, and only a few people have escaped: three or four sailors, a woman and child, and only one male passenger. All the rest are lost—is it not awful?"

Before her narration was ended, Lettice had taken her sister's hand.

"It may not be true," she whispered.

Colonel Gower stood by; and Lettice would have desired him to have their carriage called immediately, for she knew what must be Maude's agony; but her sister prevented her.

"Appearances! what will the world say?" called aloud in her ears, and bade her suffer briefly in its sight.

The Duchess of Netherby was gone; she had said to Maude that the task of telling Mrs Warburton must be hers, if on investigation the report proved correct. About half-an-hour later, Maude and Lettice returned home.

With arms round her sister's neck, Lettice tried to breathe something of hope to her. Maude was silent; with the weight of sus-

pense on her, she could not speak. The next day, the papers teemed with the dread news; and the day after that again; on the fourth day, there was a narrative by a young man, a survivor. It extinguished the last hope of all. There was a pathetic simplicity in the relation of the facts which it contained: no striving after effect, but a rude truthfulness which carried conviction with it. Maude took the paper with her to her own room, and locked the door. There she read the narrative over, till it was all before her—all that terrible night, in its wild reality. She clasped her hands over her aching, burning eyes, which had not slept since the first rumour came. She laid her brow down on the table before her; but no!—it would not be shut out: that fearful picture would be with her evermore—evermore.

The driving wind, the black sky, the loud, angry waves; the ship on fire, drifting at the mercy of the sea; the agonized shriek, the muttered imprecation, the hurried prayer. Those forms of every age and strength; the proud and the powerless, the sinewy man, the

weak woman, the feeble infant, meeting death together.

The eager selfishness of the few who could be saved, striving and struggling against the many who *must* perish. The launching of a boat under the frenzied eyes of those doomed beings; the brief minute of possible safety, before the waves drank them down greedily into their depths. The upward stretched hands, the wild, expiring last cry, audible in its shrillness above all the uproar of storm and tempest. The launching of a second boat, well manned and steered. Its one woman with a babe at her breast; that child destined to live and thrive—escaping the fearful destruction of scores of brave men—saved, doubtless, for some wise and inscrutable purpose, still in the womb of time. That one boat, impelled by the resolute arms of half a dozen men, pulling away for dear life.——

—— Resting on their oars to look back—

Streams of fire wrapping the ship fore and aft; the masts wreathed with flames like serpents; clouds of red smoke spreading far up to the black sky.

The crowded human beings gathered together in one place—a doomed congregation, joining in one last prayer.

The solitary figure of a man, who had helped to launch the boats, and had yielded his place in the last to that woman and child,—

——Resting on their oars to look back——

A few minutes, and yet a few——

They see two figures leap over the side clasped in each other's arms, anticipating death by a few seconds, as the fire gains.

They see the man who stands back from the rest, raise his hand towards heaven as in supplication; they see him wave it to them in the boat, his dark tall figure backed by the glowing fire and smoke—and that is all—they pull away, while a sound which is heard as the death-knell of a hundred souls, shakes the air terribly—every man with a prayer on his lips.

One glance again. To the winds of heaven, and the waves of the sea, and the tribunal of the Eternal, they are gone, and the boat in the dark night keeps on its way.

No one says who that man was: but for Maude there is no need to ask. He was calm always,

brave always! It was Philip Warburton, and none other, he is sure. But for her she might not thus have perished! But for her!—God help her!

She thinks of his mother,—that grave, loving mother, so proud of her good, her successful son: his mother, who had been jealous, as it were, of every thought that took him from her, yet who had been so stung by her scorn!

His mother, whom he had so loved, weeping alone, perhaps; perhaps feeding on false hope; looking daily for tidings of him to whom the day was at an end!—eagerly questioning survivors, of the how, the when, the where!

Suggesting possibilities of help where no help was,—wearying the careless out with the story of her dead son!

Those two wretched women—one and united in their great grief, yet separate for ever! Oh, Maude! Oh, sad, sorrowful woman! he will never return: you can never repay him for your last cold look! Death has fixed his impassable gulf between you; and it is all

over for ever! No more hope, no love, no pardon! It is finished.

Be wise in time: yours is not an uncommon error. You have waited and put off until the time was past when repentance could be of use either to him or you. There are yet other sacrifices, and other duties, that may be required of you: do not trust solely in your own strength: it is insufficient.

Not yet. Pride is still strong in your heart, if remorse be its companion. There will be salt tears yet, Maude, from those eyes of yours, which, after a brief, vain agony, turn from that picture of Death in the midst of Terror to the noisy gaieties of the world for consolation. Has trouble brought you no better hope, no steadier staff of consolation, than those hollow-sounding reeds?

It is a new life before you,—a life without its visionary object. There is a long future: use it worthily, lest it bring forth to your hand but briers and thorns!

CHAPTER X.

TROUBLED WATERS.

THE dreaded ordeal of a London season was safely past for Lettice Talbot: she had come forth from it scatheless; no whit changed in beauty, or simplicity, or happiness. Houghton had lost no charm, and glowed in its midsummer richness of tinted foliage and flower—a glorious welcome to her heart. Old Cyrus Evelyn had put on his spectacles to examine her narrowly: he turned away satisfied. She had brought back her lightsome spirit amongst them without a shade.

Nothing could exceed Lettice's own gratification to find herself at home once more. To use her own expression, she breathed there more freely; the noise, and bustle, and con-

stant excitement of the city were a burden to her. Yet she had had a pleasant time in London: Talbot House had received great and honoured, guests; and, better than all the rest, Lennox Gower had been a visitor there, though only an occasional one. He was there present always, however, in the mind of Lettice: no adulation, no admiration, honest or otherwise, could for a moment alienate her from her allegiance to her still unacknowledged master.

Such was the state of things when they returned to Houghton. Nothing could exceed Lettice's contentment; for Colonel Gower had told her that he should probably visit his uncle, Mr Tempest, very shortly, and then their rides would be renewed; but in mentioning this probability, he had said that it was conditional: the condition Lettice could only conjecture. How her conjectures were ended was thus:

The two sisters were together in the Oriel-room when the post-bag was brought in by Johnny. Maude handed a letter to Lettice, which the latter took with an undefined, trembling suspicion. The handwriting was not

familiar, but she was sure the bold, firm strokes could only be the production of Lennox Gower.

Lettice darted a furtive glance at her sister, who was looking over her own correspondence with a perfectly placid countenance, and then retired into the recess formed by the Oriel window to read her letter. Her trembling fingers broke the seal hastily, and her eye scanned the page, while a ripple of uncontrollable delight ran over her face.

Maude saw the expression; she quietly watched Lettice read it through thrice, then hold it clasped in her hands, while her eyes, full of a new lustre, rested on the glowing landscape outside.

Maude saw it all, and understood every sign, but there was no relenting softness in her: she quietly laid down her own numerous letters on the table; and seeming to have noticed nothing of which she had been so interested a watcher, she spoke:

"Lettice, what is your epistle? Is it from Miss Clare?"

"No," replied her sister, blushing, as she turned the paper over and over in her hand.

"From whom, then?"

"From Colonel Gower," said Lettice, giving it into her sister's hand.

Maude, with heightened colour, took it, cast her eye over it hastily, and gave it back.

"There can be but one answer to so presumptuous a proposal," said she gravely.

"Sister!"

Maude would not notice that pleading face: she went on, quietly but resolutely:

"You must write to-day, Lettice—write decisively."

"But, sister——"

"Or perhaps it would be better for me to do it," said Maude, ruthlessly interrupting what she foresaw was the beginning of a remonstrance.

"Oh no, Maude!" exclaimed Lettice, coming close up to her, and resting her hand on her sister's shoulder.

"My dear child, I will be as tenacious of your delicacy, of your dignity, as I would be of my own," said Maude, feigning to misunderstand her.

"It is not that," replied Lettice gently, her whole frame quivering with emotion.

Maude looked up into her face with well simulated astonishment. She could not see the fluctuating colour and dimmed eyes of Lettice without feeling the course she was bent on taking a very painful one. She leant back in her chair with a chagrined, reproachful air.

"Oh! Maude do not be angry with me: do do not look at me so," said Lettice, her tears trickling over their brimming lids.

"I am not angry *yet*, child: but what is all this about? You surely do not wish me to notify to this Lennox Gower that a daughter of the Talbots is honoured by the offer of his hand, and will be proud to accept it?" said Maude, ironically.

"Yes, I do," replied Lettice; and then, as if astonished at her own hardihood, she hid her face in her hands, and burst into a passion of weeping.

"Sit down, Lettice; sit down here by me, and let us understand each other," said Maude, in a low but determined tone, drawing Lettice to the couch in the Oriel. "This is not a

trifle, to be slightly discussed—that a Talbot should throw herself away upon a man so every way inferior in birth, in connection, in rank."

"But, Maude, I love him."

Poor, simple girl! that true heart-logic of thine is worth all the pretentious sophistry of pride. She knew but one reason why she should not be separated from him: "she loved him."

"This is weakness," said the elder, sharply.

"Oh, Maude! I know I am not so clever or so good as you; but do not be harsh in this, for if you say it shall not be, I must yield, I know."

"You are a mere child, and think more seriously of it than it deserves——"

"No, Maude! if you knew him as I do!"

"Listen, Lettice. I do not say you shall or shall not marry this Lennox Gower; but this I say, that if you so lower yourself, you are no longer a sister of mine!"

"Maude, have pity!"

"No! there is my resolve! Take it: think over it for an hour. Choose between us:

the old love of seventeen years—the almost mother-love—or this new fancy."

"Do not go, sister: the choice is made," replied Lettice, with forced calm.

"Then you will write to Colonel Gower yourself?"

"No, no! I cannot do that! I cannot!" and again the tears sprang to her eyes.

Maude kissed her, called her her brave little sister; and told her it would soon pass—she would forget it.

Oh Maude! how could you lie so, against your own conscience and bitter experience?

"No, Maude, I am not brave; I am a very coward: I dare not anger you. I feel how terrible it would be for me to be outcast from your love."

A deep shade passed over Maude's face, as she looked at her.

"Go out. Take a long walk: it will calm you. Meanwhile, I will write this letter," said she. Lettice gave her one long look, but met no relenting; and the next moment Maude was alone.

She sat down before the writing-table, in

her business corner, opened her blotting-book, spread a sheet of paper before her, and took a pen.

The task was less easy than she had thought. Reading over the letter her sister had received from Lennox Gower, she saw internal evidence of the worth and nobility of the man's nature. No plea would serve with him but want of love. This, he was assured by many an unmistakeable sign, he possessed: there was no use denying it. He was of old Scottish blood: poor, certainly, but proportionably proud. She could not taunt him with being of ignoble lineage, and insinuate the presumption of aspiring to an alliance with the Talbots; although she had so characterised his offer in commenting on it to Lettice. She ended by inditing a business-like refusal, in her sister's name, and intimating that no future visits at Houghton would be permitted.

Maude was sufficiently satisfied with it—she thought it cold: Lennox Gower thought it insolent: Lettice never saw it.

Meanwhile, Lettice wandered away across the Chase, not minding where she went, and

only wishing to escape from home and everybody's presence.

It was one of those bright, glowing July days, when the sun scorches up grass and flowers with fervent heat; it came beating down on her head, as, weary and sick, the girl crossed the unsheltered Chase and went through a gap in the hedge, to her favourite wood-walk: there it was cooler, and seemingly remote from all interruption. The grass was long, and pleasant to the feet, and great patches of wild flowers decked it gaudily. The hoarse cawing of the rooks overhead, the rush of startled hare or rabbit across the path, as her rustling frighted them, were so many sights and sounds that but a short while ago would have enlisted all her attention. But now, she sat down idly on the trunk of a fallen tree, and plucked the blades of grass and flowers within her reach, without a thought of them.

Never before had the clear sky, the sun, or the thousand voices of nature in the woods been unheeded by her. Poor child!

she was deaf and blind to everything but the echo and bare aspect of her own misery.

The feeling was new to her. She could not comprehend it. She, who had been cared for with so much tenderness; whose slightest wish was gratified, every childish grief hushed; to whom all loving beings had ministered; who had scarcely believed in the existence of sorrow for such as she was, or had fancied herself so engirt with good that it could not come nigh her,—this petted, spoilt, delicate thing lay crushed and panting beneath so great a weight of trouble,—a trouble cast on her, too, by the hand she had trusted, and which had never till now given her but the most loving caress.

Poor little Lettice!

The very place where she sat had seen those sisterly kindnesses over and over again. She had been joyous there, and, perhaps, presumptuously trustful in her happiness. And now—sad, sad! seeking somewhere to hide from that worshipped, yet feared, sister, with a heart gasping and aching with its first wound!

Poor little Lettice!

She sat there a long while, taking no heed of the hours as they went. It was not noon when she left the Priory, and the woods had begun to wear the twilight haze before she thought of returning. All those hours she had passed in the company of her thoughts—some wild, some sad; few bitter, none angry. It did not enter into her mind to accuse Maude of cruelty or of harshness: it seemed her right and her privilege to exact any sacrifice she should think fit. Her word given, she had no thought either of drawing back: Lennox Gower was henceforward to be nothing to her.

Down went all her air-built castles before the waft of that chilling blast of fortune.

When Lettice gathered her shawl up round her shoulders, and rose from her resting-place on the tree-trunk, she rose up an altered creature. Geoffry Meynell, meeting her as he crossed the Chase, wondered what had come over her. She wondered herself. Her head ached and burned, while a shiver ran through her limbs from head to foot. She could

scarcely drag herself up the terrace-steps to meet Maude, who was pacing there to and fro, anxiously waiting for her return.

"Foolish child! you have tired yourself too much," was Maude's greeting, as she saw the flushed cheeks and wavering steps of her sister. She put her hand within her arm, and guided her into the house, and up to her room. They met nobody by the way, and Maude locked the door, to secure them from intrusion.

Let me help you to dress, darling, instead of Aimée. You must not let any one see you give way in this manner: believe me, Letty, it will never do," said Maude.

"I feel that I do not care what anybody thinks or says. Leave me alone, quite alone, for to-night, Maude: to-morrow, I will try to be all you can wish," pleaded Lettice, weariness and pain expressed in every movement.

"But it is not good to be alone in trouble. Is it so great a trouble, Lettice? It will pass; and by-and-bye you will come to wonder how you could be so silly," persisted Maude, drawing her sister to her bosom.

Lettice did not resist the caress; she lay quite passive in her sister's arms, her eyes glittering and her cheek glowing feverishly.

They sat thus for some minutes, without moving; then Lettice raised her head, and spoke.

"Maude, if you would but leave me alone for to-night," she pleaded.

"That you may cry, and fret, and make yourself ill? No, no! I cannot. Come, change your dress, and let us go down stairs. Miss Sedley and I will sing for you. Come, let me help you."

"Maude, my head aches so! Do—do leave me!"

Thus urged, Miss Talbot reluctantly departed, after seeing Lettice comfortably placed on a couch; but as soon as her sister was out of hearing, Lettice rose and undressed herself, shut out carefully the summer evening light, and lay down in her bed. The moment her head rested on the pillow, her tears burst forth, and thoroughly exhausted, she wept herself to sleep.

A few hours after Maude came silently and

looked at her sister. The change she saw in that face made her brow contract and her lip quiver. Nevertheless, she firmly believed as she had said, that the pain of the struggle would pass; and if she took a somewhat reproachful conscience to her own chamber, she soon stilled it with the argument that what she had done was just and necessary—praiseworthy rather than otherwise.

The long night passed to Lettice in a dead sleep. She awoke in the morning with an aching brain, a thirst, and a burning hand. She felt miserably ill. Nevertheless, she rose and rang for Aimée, determined not to disappoint Maude by shewing a weakness for which she exhibited no sympathy.

Aimée's eye immediately caught her mistress' symptoms.

"Oh, Miss Lettice! you were not down in the village yesterday surely—were you ma'am—where they have the fever so bad?" she asked, anxiously.

"No, Aimée, I have not been out of the park for three days: dress me quickly, I hear my sister going down stairs," replied Lettice.

But when Aimée began to brush out the long bright hair, she bade her desist.

"Tell Maude I am not well, and bring me a cup of tea, Aimée; I feel a choking thirst," she said.

Aimée arranged her young mistress on the couch, and went to do her bidding. A few seconds after Maude stood beside her sister, anxious and pale: Aimée's communication had been abrupt.

"You have fretted yourself ill, Letty, dear," she said, stooping over her.

"I shall be better presently; it is only my head," replied Lettice. Maude laid her cool hand on the burning forehead, and as Aimée re-entered with the tea, she hastily left the room and summoned Miss Sedley.

Miriam had a keener eye for suffering than had Maude: she drew her aside, said she was afraid Lettice had caught the fever stirring in the village, and advised sending for Doctor Sands. Maude was at first incredulous: she was aware of a cause of excitement unknown to the others, and attributed her sister's feverishness to that. But as that day wore on, and

the next, and the pain and suffering increased, she yielded to persuasion, and Saunders was sent to Salford to fetch Dr Sands. The physician came, grave and important. He gave it as his opinion, that Miss Lettice's was a slight attack of nervous fever; not by any means the beginning of the virulent typhus, which was so prevalent: he hoped that a very few days would see her restored to her usual health.

Doctor Sands was right. Her physical organisation was sound; and before the week was out, Lettice went about the house as heretofore, only with a slight degree of lassitude, which everybody attributed to her attack of fever.

While Lettice had been confined to her chamber, Maude had received a letter from Colonel Gower; there was also a second, which she considered herself justified in withholding from her sister while in that nervous state. The letter addressed to herself contained a manly remonstrance, and a demand to be heard and answered by Lettice herself. This received for reply—a statement of the utter impossibility of any interview taking place, on account of Lettice's illness.

Contrary to her expectation, this epistle brought Colonel Gower down to Mr Temple's immediately, and Maude had to go through the unpleasantness of hearing his claims put forth, and seeing her own precious reasons scorned, ridiculed, trampled on. She was made to feel their insignificance and utter meanness. The two parted in anger: Lennox Gower telling Miss Talbot, that he would take no answer as final that did not come from Lettice's own lips: that he would wait till she could see him without danger; but see her he would. Maude knew herself for once despised, set at naught, defied; and what was more, she could not help admiring the manly tone of character that stood so firmly on its intrinsic worth, and made so little of what her world-creed thought so much. But for all that she determined to hold to her first resolution; and she knew well Lettice would not dare her anger to that point.

A few days after this, Lettice went out alone. Maude did not endeavour to prevent it; she knew that what Lennox Gower had said he would do, no effort of hers could prevent, and

as the interview had to take place, the sooner it was over the better: she had no fears of its results: she understood Lettice's character too well.

The event proved her right. After the lapse of an hour or rather more, Maude, who had secretly watched Lettice's return, saw her coming slowly across the chase with Rouser at her side. Maude could not see her face, but she knew by her very step and air that she had seen her lover; that she had bid him adieu; that she had no hope of ever seeing him again. There was a throb of pity in her breast as she watched her ascending the terrace steps, and turning to the entrance with a lagging tired step, so different to what it had been. Lettice came into the hall, and admitted Rouser.

Maude heard her say to him, "Lie there good felow—lie there, faithful Rouser;" and then her foot-fall came on across the hall: her sister went to the door to meet her, but nstead of coming in as usual, she went wearily up stairs, and straight on to her own room.

Maude felt somewhat grieved that Lettice

did not seek her in this sorrow; but as she carefully avoided the subject, she did not like to renew it. A short while after, Lettice came down into the drawing-room—looking pale, but more satisfied and tranquil than she had done since the receipt of her first and last letter.

Not a word was said between them of what occupied the thoughts of both; but the day following Maude heard that Colonel Gower had left the neighbourhood: it was all over, and both were easier. Lettice resumed her walks—her rambles—her rides; but never without Rouser now. Thus passed over several weeks without any change or improvement taking place in Lettice's health; for since her slight attack of fever, there had been hanging about her an appearance of languor, which that scarcely sufficiently accounted for.

Miss Sedley had been no uninterested spectator of the events which had occurred during the last year. Lettice's attachment had satisfied her, for Lennox Gower had always been a favourite; and great were her surprise and

dismay when she discovered from Lettice's pale face, and finally her reluctant confession, that he had been dismissed. For a full hour, she sat musing upon the circumstance, turning it in her mind every way—arguing herself into a belief of the propriety of interfering in so momentous an affair: it was no business of hers. Miss Talbot might, and probably would resent it; but was that a sufficient reason why she should not endeavour to prevent the sacrifice of the child's happiness? It could but end in her dismissal from the Priory; and in that case she would have the satisfaction of reflecting that she had done what she could. In this mind she spake.

It was after tea in the drawing-room. Lettice, on the plea of a headache, had gone to her own room, and they were left alone. Maude lay back in her chair, idly turning over the leaves of a new novel. Miss Sedley's fingers were busy with that eternal knitting. The subject was a difficult one to approach, not having been mentioned between them before. The poor governess felt to the full the delicacy

of the task she had imposed on herself, and her resolution almost failed her. In any agitation the needles only went the faster; and their rapid click, click, kept time to the beating of her heart. Miss Talbot was not slow at discerning any uneasiness in those about her; and, after looking in Miss Sedley's face for a moment, she asked if anything was amiss.

"Not with myself, Miss Talbot, but I am troubled about Lettice," replied Miss Sedley.

"She has a cold hanging about her; but I am not uneasy on that score: she is of a sound constitution, and will soon shake it off," said Maude, carelessly. "We have had some damp, chill days, for the season lately; but a few warm days will make all right again: girls are often subject to these attacks; they never will take sufficient care of themselves."

"Her appetite is gone; she is always languid and weary: she is not the same girl she was six months ago," persisted Miss Sedley, who was gathering courage.

"If you think, Miss Sedley, that there is anything serious in the matter, Dr Sands shall be called in again; but I think, as before, that

your anxiety overrates her malady," replied Miss Talbot.

"Dr Sands could do nothing for her in this instance," said Miss Sedley.

"What do you mean? What are you aiming at?"

"I mean that Lettice's ailment is not physical only."

"Then my sister has told you all?"

"I have never been the poor child's confidante: this much she told me, that we should see Colonel Gower no more at Houghton. It did not need much penetration to deduce the why and the wherefore. I know I am trenching on dangerous ground, Miss Talbot; but my love for Lettice must excuse my presumption."

"There is nothing to excuse, Miss Sedley. It is natural you should have an interest in the girl you have educated. But I must regret that, under the circumstances, you did not impart your suspicions to me before the affair got to a climax. I was less quick-sighted to the growth of the attachment, than, it seems to me, you must have been. I assure you

it had attained its greatest height before I discovered it; and I was never more astounded in my life than when Lettice placed Colonel Gower's letter, containing his proposal, in my hands."

"Had I imagined you ignorant of his pretensions, or likely to be opposed to them, I should have warned you, without doubt; but the thought never occurred to me."

"How! never occurred to you! Do you mean to say, Miss Sedley, that you fancied it a probable thing that I should consent to my sister, Lettice Talbot, marrying Lennox Gower?"

"I see nothing monstrous in such an union."

"Then our opinions differ materially on that point, and we had better drop the subject."

"And is your sister's happiness to be sacrificed to this contemptible family pride?"

Maude's eyes flashed, but she restrained herself: she forgave the sneer for the love that caused its bitterness.

"Oh, Miss Talbot! you love the poor child," continued Miss Sedley, earnestly; how can

you bear to see her day after day with that mournful face? you must notice how she is changed."

"I do not, truly. Letty is somewhat perverse; she makes no effort to divert her mind, and annoys me often by her pertinacious avoidance of society."

"How can you say she is perverse? A more gentle-spirited creature never breathed on God's earth, or she would not be the victim of your tyranny now."

"There is no tyranny, no oppression, no cruelty in the case," said Miss Talbot, with a calmness singularly contrasted with the old governess's warmth. "You are under a mistake altogether, Miss Sedley. Lettice had her choice of two things: I made her acceptance of Colonel Gower's offer conditional. She refused him. If she continues to lament him, she is weaker than I thought; but even if she do, it will wear off."

"There is something wrong: I do not understand it. If she resigned him voluntarily there would be no room for complaint."

"Does she complain? have you heard her?"

"Not in words, poor child. But is not her weary way of going about—the languid, spiritless gesture—a more pitiful and touching complaint than words can make? Miss Talbot, I beseech you, consider before it is beyond your power to remedy or atone, whether Letty's happiness is not worth more than a long list of ancestral honours. Your position to that poor motherless child is a very responsible one."

"I respect your motives, Miss Sedley; but they cannot alter my opinion or my determination. For sometime the matter has lain at rest: any allusion to it in her presence, would be very ill-judged. I think Letty has given up dwelling on any disappointment she felt at the time; and it is always well to avoid irritating an old wound."

"It was a wound, then, you allow?"

"To a certain extent it was: but I think her feelings were less deeply touched than you romantically imagine. You are a sensible person: does it not strike you as vain and frivolous to discuss what we can by no means alter? Colonel Gower has made an exchange

into a regiment ordered on foreign service, and sailed ten days ago."

"Oh, Miss Talbot! you have done a most cruel and unjust thing!—a thing you will repent of bitterly, for all your pride! I would not have your burden to bear, no, not for all the honours of the Talbots and Plantagenets to boot!"

Miss Sedley spoke passionately, with heightened colour and quivering lip; then gathering up her knitting, which, in the heat of the remonstrance had fallen to the ground, she made her escape from the room.

The scene had discomposed Maude.

She had already experienced a vague feeling of remorse, although she disclaimed it so forcibly. The fact was, that she could not bear the thought, and she would not recognize it. The decided and unmistakeable opinion expressed by the usually meek Miss Sedley was as a trumpet sound to her conscience. What if she were right? What if the deed were to come home to her at last? What if she had indeed done a wrong and an injustice? But she would not listen. She thrust the thought

away, and hardened herself against the fear that accompanied it.

"Am I never to see the fruition of my hopes?" she gasped, reproaching fate for her disappointments.

A few weeks after, Lettice sat opposite Maude one evening at sundown in the Oriel window. Neither spoke. Both hearts were filled with busy thoughts. The face of the elder sister was grave, even to sternness; that of Lettice was turned towards the window, resting her brow on her hands, and looking down. For the first time, Maude could not blind herself to the change that was taking place in Lettice: the golden light of the sun fell full on her hair hanging in tangled tresses on her neck; one white shoulder gleamed out from the veil, one arm hung listless by her side, the fingers almost transparent; there was a painful weariness in her attitude. The roundness of early womanhood gone; her marvellous beauty faded; nothing but the

shadow of fair Lettice Talbot remained. Was that pale shadow to depart too ?

Oh, Maude ! look out over that wide expanse of hill and dale, waving woods and gleaming waters—they are the same—ever the same—a very great estate, a right noble possession ! You destine them for little Lettice—a royal dower. Shall she claim it at your hands, or is her inheritance elsewhere ? Does that strike cold on your heart, Maude? Will conscience abide no longer in the bonds of silence ? does it cry aloud bitterly, and insist upon being heard ?

Look at her again!

Poor Lettice! once, laughing, merry, bright-eyed Lettice !

Press your hand on your bosom, Maude : that was a sharp pang ! From those very bright eyes is falling a positive rain of tears: they have quite washed out the fair blush roses from her cheeks, and every drop falls scalding on your heart now. You cannot bear to see it—you have been a mother as well as a sister to her. You have loved her. She knows it—she never doubted it.

She has been very gentle, tender, submissive always; but it does not follow that she cannot understand the bitter wrong you have done her. You would make her happy, if you could do it in your own way and on your own terms; but that cannot be. Pity, Maude, that when you gave her a burden like your own to bear, you could not endue her with like strength. Yes; go to your own chamber, and weep there—tears are no strangers to your eyes now.

Think whether it is better to abandon pride, or to lose her. Think what it is to be solitary by the winter fire: what it is to have no household ties, no loving tendrils twining about the heart. Think what it is to be alone with your repentance and God—all tender memories in the safe keeping of the grave.

Think, and decide, whilst Providence leaves the decision in your hand.

You will wait *a little while.* Perhaps your fears exaggerate: she never complains. Have you not had enough of putting off till the morrow? Why will you palter so blindly with the right? Oh, Maude! remember her—what she

was—what she is! Go back to her now; take her to your heart—comfort her. While there is yet time—you will—you will cast away your poor ambitious and skeleton delusions: she shall be happy at any cost.

Miss Talbot returned to the Oriel-room, all signs of her struggle within effaced.

Lettice was sitting there still, just as she had left her; only Rouser had crept to her side, and her fingers were toying in his long hair. She rose as her sister entered, and went a few paces towards her: then her strength seemed to fail her, and she sank on the couch, putting her hand to her head.

"Maude, I think I have got the fever at last: my head feels so strange," she said.

"My darling, don't think it—it cannot be!" exclaimed Maude, wildly; "it is impossible;" and through her mind there shot an agony of dread, lest God should forestal her late repentance, and make it of no avail.

On the morrow, the bright first of Sep-

tember, came Doctor Sands, smiling and jesting at Miss Lettice's late attack on the nerves. Miss Sedley cut him short, by telling him it was the fever. He was alive to her actual peril instantly, her previous prostration only laying her the more open to the violence of the disease; but he concealed his anxiety under a shroud of learned and unintelligible phrases, hopes, and probabilities. In face of Miss Talbot's cold despair, he dared not utter his fears.'

As he descended the stairs after his visit, Saunders, who had been hanging about for the purpose, crossed the hall to open the door for him.

"Is there hope?" asked the old servant, anxiously. The doctor nodded gravely.

Mr Evelyn came hastily from the library at the moment.

"How is Miss Lettice, sir?" he asked.

"She has youth on her side," responded the doctor; and he made his escape from further interrogatories.

Cyrus Evelyn retreated into his own room;

and Saunders went to promulgate the meagre news he had received in the servants' hall.

"Oh, the dear lamb! she'll get round; I'm sure she will," said Mrs Mellow: "it aint likely such a bright young creature as Miss Lettice will die of it, like poor folks, with the nursing and tending she'll get."

The days went by slowly in that quiet, darkened room, with the falling leaves and the grey autumn clouds, and the swift coming winter winds outside.

Who shall say what words of bitter regret and vain forgiveness were breathed—how many prayers found their utterance so weak—how many old dreams and sorrows came up over Maude's heart, like the scorching waft of the sirocco across the parched desert?

Jealous of every look of that pale, patient face, lying on its pillow placid and resigned; perhaps hopeful for early death, while that

passionate love broods over her. Maude neither rests nor sleeps. She never leaves Lettice by night or day; no hand but hers raises the aching head, or smooths the uneasy pillow. She knows well that the agony of remorseful affection, that tears, that prayers, that concessions, are all of no avail against God's angel, if he is bid to gather in that pure, young soul.

But she pleads; she pleads earnestly, as one who has trust in His infinite mercy, and His infinite power, as the crisis draws near.

The leaves have changed from yellow to dusky-brown, and have fallen thick on the Chase. The house is hushed as if death were there already. The servants go about softly; and old Cyrus Evelyn sits in his library chair, with his hands resting on the top of his cane (needed to guide him across the room now), his darling folios unheeded, and with no thought but for the young life trembling betwixt earth and heaven.

Rouser is admitted into Lettice's room daily. He puts his paws on the coverlet of the bed, and fixes his wistful eye on her face, while her hand rests softly on his head, or wanders

caressingly over his rough coat. Dr Sands, coming for his daily visit, finds him always on guard; and Rouser gets to lick his hand as he goes into the room, as if to bespeak his favour and his utmost skill for his young mistress.

By-and-bye there goes a whisper through the house that the day will decide it. Everybody is hushed and silent. The majestic Johnny is shut up in his pantry: nobody but Betsy knows what he is doing there, or why his eyes are so strange at tea-time. Mellow is too troubled to tease that incompetent damsel any more; and there is peace between them. Nurse Goodhugh comes and goes in silence; and nobody meets the Lady of Houghton, or sees her face.

Miriam Sedley leaves her place of watcher, and holds a vigil of prayers and tears in her old school-room for those two, suffering under God's hand. Maude's heart grows rebellious; her grief is passionate and pitiful, as Lettice takes no note of the faces round her bed, and talks softly to herself: perhaps of the land whither they fear she is hastening; perhaps of some who care not to be left behind.

It is a day of intermittent storm and sun—a thick-clouded twilight—a night of starless gloom. All below sit listening for the physician's step coming forth of that chamber: sit holding their breath, and praying inwardly.

Stillness and solemnity within; the storm and the wind without!

But the hand is withheld—the fiat is gone forth—the girl shall live! Dr Sands was all but worshipped as he pronounced his oracular decision, taking to himself all the glory: Saunders could have bowed down and kissed his feet.

There was one waiting in the Chase under a tree, sheltered somewhat from the pelting rain, but not entirely. He sprang forward, and seized the bridle as the doctor's horse passed him. His voice was hoarse and tremulous.

"How is all at the Priory?" were the words gasped out.

"All is well. Who are you, sir?" answered Sands, somewhat alarmed. But the man had sprung aside, and was on his way across the grass, out of the beaten track, with a deep

thankfulness in his heart. It was Colonel Gower.

All over the Chase the great oaks are standing up gaunt and bare, and the snow comes drifting down silently covering the earth with its cold, white carpetting. Throughout the Priory there is diffused a chastened joy. Lettice Talbot is sitting up for the first time in her dressing-room, folded in white wrapping-gown, with a pretty cap encircling her dainty face, and guarded with devoted affection. All her beautiful hair has been cut off, and only a single tress is left to shade her fair forehead. She looks at herself in the glass, and says she should wish to be introduced to that pale looking lady who, she is sure, is quite a stranger to her. Maude smiles thoughtfully, and gazes into her eyes: suddenly she speaks, as if mistrusting the strength of her resolve.

"Lettice! listen to me."

There was a pause, in which Maude pondered

on her distasteful task; and Lettice said she was all attention.

"Lettice, if you had the world to choose from, what would you have to make you happy?"

Lettice started, then flushed at the thought which had almost risen to her lips; for it was in her heart always. Maude understood her well.

"You shall have it," she said.

"Oh, Maude! don't talk in that way!"

"I am in earnest. I have constrained you where I thought I had a right, but where, I feel now, I have none. It is not just to sacrifice your happiness to my principles."

"Maude! It cannot be undone: but you were hard."

"It can be undone!—it shall be undone!"

Lettice looked up with eager eyes, and clasped her thin fingers pleadingly.

"Did you not tell me Lennox was gone back to India?"

"Yes—and I thought so; but he did not sail as he intended: he has been staying at Mr Tempest's for the last month."

The eager eyes filled with tears, and the white lips quivered.

"Oh, Maude! and is he gone away without a word?"

"Who said he was gone? I did not. So, before all things in the world, Lennox Gower is necessary to your happiness: speak, child! is it so?

"Why will you torture me, Maude?"

And Lettice hid her face amongst the pillows. Maude sprang to her side and raised her.

"Lettice, forgive me! Lettice, if you do indeed love him, I will come between you no more. I believe you do: but you are a degenerate Talbot to be so soft-hearted."

Thus Maude tried to smile away the agony she had aroused. Lettice lay back in her arms, mute and still, as if she were striving to bear patiently with some deep wrong.

Maude went on.

"Colonel Gower has been to inquire after you daily. Will you see him when he comes?"

"Oh, Maude!"

It was such a changed voice; its plaintive tone was lost in the thrill of delighted surprise.

"Then he shall be admitted, if you can bear it."

"If I can bear it!" echoed Lettice. "Oh, Maude! you are my dear, good sister again, who petted me when I was a child!"

"Ah, yes! and made you long after forbidden things, and often gave you what was not good for you," replied Maude, smiling.

"You are not doing that *now*, sister dear: it is for my happiness," said Lettice.

"So you think, foolish child: I pray God it may prove so."

Indeed Maude only prayed that her sacrifice might not be for nought.

"I have no doubt," murmured Lettice, quietly.

"Surely not. I should not think your love earnest if you *could* doubt."

"You do not know him as I do, Maude."

"Have I not known him ever since he was a boy?"

"Ah, Maude! but he has not loved *you!*"

And Lettice blushed, to think how clear a vision we have into the hearts which that key has opened to us.

Maude sighed, and stroked the little hands she had taken in hers; longing to end this scene, which had been to her an effort throughout: how painful Lettice could not guess.

"I am going to leave you now, Lettice," she said, stooping down to kiss the soft eyes that again looked up in her face gratefully and trustingly.

"I have letters to write to Mr Wylie, and that London man at Dalston. Do not fidget until I come back. Shall I ask Miss Sedley to come to you for a while?"

"Not now, Maude. I would rather be alone," replied Lettice.

"Then lie down and rest. You must not make yourself unhappy with thinking: all will come right."

Maude left the room; and Lettice, cheered by the gleam of hope that brightened the horizon of her mental prospect, but now so blank and drear, enjoyed a gentle happiness as she lay back on her couch, gazing dreamily into the fire. She whispered all kinds of loving things to Rouser, who was free of her room, and had now, seeing something of her

old gaiety in her face, come and laid his great black head against her knees. Rouser blinked at her intelligently, as if he perfectly understood what she was communicating to him and begged to express his unqualified gratification thereat.

About half-an-hour passed thus, long to neither of them, when the door opening softly, broke off her reverie. Lettice turned half round, expecting to see Maude; but it was not the Lady of Houghton: she was in the Oriel-room, trembling and flushed after the brief interview which she had had with Lennox Gower, in which her pride had bowed, as never Talbot pride bowed before.

Lennox Gower stood for a second at the doorway. Lettice uttered a cry of joy, and tried to rise: but the emotion was too strong and sudden. His arms were round her, and raised her to his breast in a moment.

"Shall I call Maude?" he whispered, bending anxiously over her.

"Call no one. Oh, Lennox! I am happy: so happy!"

And the soft blushing cheek, on which his

first love-kiss was now impressed with tender fervour, shrank not away: she lay in his arms, resting at last—a fit haven for that loving, sensitive heart.

The conversation of happy lovers is proverbially uninteresting to all but the parties themselves; so we will leave them in Maude's dressing-room, with Rouser performing a congratulatory dance round and about the pair, expressing, in unmistakeable dog-language, his entire approval of what is going forward.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TOWN AS MAUDE SAW IT IN A MORNING WALK.

In due course of time, many-tongued rumour sent forth the report of Lettice Talbot's engagement to Colonel Gower, and Miss Talbot found herself called upon to receive a kind of surprised and condoling congratulation from all her acquaintance. It was clear that the sentiments she felt on the matter, had oozed out somehow; and her mortification was proportionate: she bore it coldly and proudly, as she did everything else, and skilfully concealed it from the only heart it could wound.

When Sara Clare heard of it, she was almost beside herself. "They were," she averred, "mere children; Lettice Talbot was a perfect baby: what could Miss Talbot mean by allowing her

sister to perpetrate such a flagrant piece of folly? It was such a marriage as nobody ever heard of."

People in general thought it very odd that a woman of Miss Talbot's principles should give her consent; but people in general are ignorant of what they presume to animadvert upon. The great world which she had worshipped to the ruin of her own happiness, looked on Maude as a strange disappointed kind of woman who lived in half seclusion, and who would die some day without making any gap in its moving pageant. Her brief butterfly existence of ten years ago had utterly been forgotten; and she was content to let it be so: she was becoming a better woman than she had been, and thinking gravely of duties undone, which might yet be performed.

That winter, Mr Wylie died suddenly; and during the interval which elapsed between that event and the appointment of a successor to his office, Maude paid several visits to Salford. The painfully neglected state of the people living about Old Court, could not but strike her; and the impression was lasting.

It was a very severe season, and work was bad; there were troops of men and boys prowling idle about the streets, making them noisy with their mirth, and dangerous with their strife. Miss Talbot subscribed largely to all the charities for the alleviation of the distress; sighed to think how little she seemed to do; and wished—yes, wished earnestly—that she knew a better way of relieving the misery.

Mrs Powys bade her go amongst the poor, and see for herself; but Maude shook her head: she knew how they lived: she knew as much as any one could tell her. Mrs Powys doubted and urged; and one day Maude was prevailed on to go out on foot, and make a personal research into the condition of her town tenants. The cholera was very bad: the people were dying by scores: a better time for awakening her to the reality of struggling misery could not have been. On every hand, poverty and suffering met her—often guilt. Personal fear she had none; and the search begun, she went on boldly. She went down one narrow lane into a court surrounded by houses, tall, old, and grim with dirt and decay.

Leaning against the jamb of an open door in this court, stood a tall haggard girl, the only person visible. Maude would have spoken to her, but the cool *insouciance* with which she maintained her position, and the hard expression of her young, insolent face, repelled her. She was faded rather than pale: her eyes and features were beautiful. Her hair was abundant, and neatly dressed; but her clothing was scant, and looked all the more so for its evident striving after decency. She had a sparkling ring which looked sadly out of place on her poor thin fingers, and tawdry ear-drops in her ears. Maude gave her one look, and passed on—not in scorn or indignation; but in sickness of heart and pity. There is a community in sorrow; and all the strivings after smartness on that poor wasted form, could not contradict the tale of suffering betrayed by the white lip and hollow cheek. Maude's heart ached for her. She went forward to the end of the court, where a low wall divided it from a sluggish flowing narrow stream, or ditch rather: there she paused and looked back.

The girl was scattering crumbs on the stones

where a few sparrows had congregated. Maude turned round; she would speak to her.

"You live here?" said Miss Talbot, interrogatively; with a slight flush on her own face, though that of the girl was white as marble.

"Yes."

"I hear there is much distress in this quarter of the town; and it is my wish to alleviate it as far as possible—in worthy instances at least."

The girl, with her finger on her lip, stood mute. Amongst all that crying famine, and plague, and death, could she not instance one? not one.

She shook her head.

"But it is so," persisted Maude.

"Aye, it is so," echoed the girl. "It is so, and has been so, ever since I came here; and long before. But there is one up stairs who will tell you more than I can, if you'll wait his coming down: he is seeing a sick companion of mine—the last time he'll need to come, I think; but others say different. You need not be afraid: it is not the cholera, only consumption," she said hastily; for Maude had turned away: not with

repugnance, as she thought, but to hide the tears which came from her eyes.

A few seconds after, there was a step heard descending the stairs; the girl stood aside to let the new comer pass. He was a Roman catholic priest. To give these priests their due, they stand firm to their post in time of danger: they do not abandon men when death comes amongst them in terrible shapes; if they be subtile and wily in their dealings. As a body, Miss Talbot, cordially disliked them; but this man's face commanded respect: no self-indulgent, ease-loving hireling was he; but the faithful, blind apostle of a false creed.

"Mr Fairfax," began the girl, "here is a lady anxious to add her drop of comfort to the driblets that charity is doling out to us just now:—tell her how."

Mr Fairfax glanced at her reproachfully; but she went on in an ironical tone:

"Never mind me, sir; it is my way; I am hard—hard!" she said, laughing. "I'm not like poor Jessie up stairs, with a sigh and a tear for the days that are gone, and a prayer and a hope for the days to come: and I don't

complain or rail against the world for that. I'm no worse off than thousands are—that's philosophy, Mr Fairfax, isn't it?" Bitter philosophy!

The priest turned to Maude.

"If you can tell me how to help these unhappy people, many of them tenants of my own, I shall be grateful to you," said she.

"The cholera is doing a great deal for us, ma'am," interrupted the girl: "there are fewer mouths to fill, and the parish will bury them it wont feed; so when it is over there will be times of prosperity with all of us. There is a man lives opposite here, who had a wife and eight children a month ago; the mother is gone, and seven of her little ones; so though nine shillings a-week was grinding poverty for ten, it will be riches for two!" and the girl flung up her arms and laughed a shrill laugh, far more hideous than her former insolent coolness. The priest sighed, but was silent.

"Mind, sir! they must be *worthy* objects, who are *striving against fate*, and honest men who *bear their burden nobly*. Oh! I know their cant—I do! Help them; and let the fallen sink

down deep in the mire, and rot there out of the sight of their betters. I fear, ma'am, your charity will not be largely taxed, if you help only those who are struggling, and leave those that are down to die at leisure; for in this town we are sunk very low indeed."

"Go to Jessie, Marion; she needs you now more than ever, and she will not need you long: leave me to talk to this lady."

"Talk as much as you like; but let her come amongst us, and see with her own eyes, the crime, grief, poverty, and ignorance, that are festering into a loathsome disease amongst us: it will do her good: it would do all like her good to see how people live and die in this enlightened age. See, sir; *we* do read sometimes, and to a purpose too. I know it is a shame—ay, and a crying sin, that such things are; but since they *are*, let the knowledge of it go home with them to their grand homes, and be pondered over till it produce a remedy: the time is come."

And with these last bitter words, the girl turned and ran up the narrow stair, laughing at the impression she had made on the dignified lady. Maude sighed.

"I thought I knew all that was passing amongst the people: I did not know a tithe of of it," she said.

"Many, madam, are aware of *facts*, but have no time to consider *feelings*," replied Mr Fairfax. "But this is not bad to what you may see and hear not fifty paces off. That girl is young. She is not town bred; and there was a day, probably not far back, when she could boast of innocence: unlike some kennel-trained women of this neighbourhood, who breathe vice from their cradles. She is calloused by labour and half-starvation: but there is good in her yet."

The priest was right; there was good in Marion: she had not come to this pass save by slow degrees, and through much privation. Few women stand up so strongly against the continuous blast of evil fortune as she had done. Fatherless and motherless, she had toiled and struggled as a solitary woman may; in severe bodily privation, in lack of work, she had applied for help to one well able to afford it—to one standing high in men's esteem, and of charitable contribution-list notoriety. She had been told to conform to circumstances; and she went away

full of bitterness. She obeyed to the best of her power: but it is hard to die so young. She was pretty then, and well-behaved; but her spirit rebelled, and, as many another has done before and since, Marion yielded to the tempter, and sealed her fate. Not depraved at heart, it was a prolonged agony: many a time she looked covetously at the black waters of the foul stream that ran past the court, and turned away, withheld by an invisible hand. It would have been easier to die so than to live; but life was stronger than despair. It was at this time that Jessie Jefferson was left to work out her destiny. They became companions. Marion nursed her through a terrible fever, and from that time they became inseparable. Jessie did not rally after her fever, but sank daily; the parish doctor at last told Marion there was no hope for her life.

In this situation it was that Mr Fairfax found them out. He helped them, both with purse and hearty counsels. There came with him sometimes a woman; it is of little matter what creed: she was a Christian and without bigotry, who became a true friend to them. She

shewed no shrinking away from the wretched place, and no air of condescension in the benefits she conferred. She had probably seen sorrow herself; she was so patient with the erring and fearful. Her step became the most welcome sound to Jessie's ear, and even to Marion's. This last poor girl had often in her bitterness been tempted to ask, "where is God?" a bitter question, which the poor and desolate may sometimes be pardoned for demanding, when his chastisements fall on them more heavily than they can bear. But gentle womanly teaching brought repentance and better hopes to both those girls: Jessie's last days were peaceful through its instrumentality. Of this woman, Mr Fairfax spok to Miss Talbot: he offered to furnish h r with her address, saying, that wherever in Salford there was one sick or in misery, desolate or oppressed, she knew of it. But Maude declined.

"I have begun my search," she said, "and I will go through with it: perhaps, as that girl who has just left us observed, it may do me good. I have lived too long in utter

ignorance of what it is one of my chief duties to know."

Maude gave money into Mr Fairfax's hand, begging him to apply it to the best of his ability. He appeared surprised at the amount of the sum, and looked as if asking to whom he was indebted for such liberal and opportune assistance. She hesitated for a moment, and then told him her name.

"You have much in your power to do; and you incur the risk of the unfaithful steward by neglecting it," said Mr Fairfax, bowing gravely: "as a priest of God, I may remind you, that you are answerable for much of the evil here. Miss Talbot's name is known among her people."

"With neither blessings or prayers," murmured Maude, in no wise offended by the plain speaking of her new acquaintance.

"Madam, you have done little to merit them. The people know you, but as one of a class so far removed from them that you seem of different flesh and soul: too distant to know their struggles, and too indifferent to help them."

"It has been so," said Maude, regretfully; "but it is not too late:" feeling in her own heart that there were no longer any private interests to come between her and good, or to draw her aside from the works of mercy and reformation so sorely needed. "I will do my best," she continued: "what money can do shall be done. Now, sir, I will see for myself."

Mr Fairfax stood aside, and she passed out of the court, and went on slowly through the narrow streets and alleys which bounded and shut in the Lady's Hospital. It was the same picture every where: children in the dirtiest condition to which human nature can be supposed to come; knots of young men and girls half-quarrelling in tipsy frolic; idle women standing gossiping at open doors.

"Why are they not at school?" asked Maude of one woman who was picking the stray ones of her brood out of the street, with many a slap and harsh word, which assuredly had as sharp retort.

"School, indeed!" said the woman, sneering, as she eyed her questioner from head to foot: "school! this is school, isn't it? It is the

only one most on us can afford: it did for me —it will do for them."

So saying, she clutched the youngest of her shaggy flock by the arm, and dragged him off, loudly protesting, down the dark alley up which she had come.

Maude went on.

Passing St Grim's Church, she saw no less than seven coffins waiting for their final consignment to the dust. She went into the grave-yard, and stood by to see and hear: mourners there were without any sign of mourning, paying the last respect to child or parent, shivering and wondering who would be the next. Some standing far away for fear of infection; here and there one with red eyes and quivering lips: but all without exception carrying outward and visible signs of the gnawing wolf within. One boy of about ten begged of her: he had come to his father's funeral; his uncle was there, he said: his mother was ill, there were four of them at home.

The boy did not testify any sorrow; yet his was a countenance that indicated good dispo-

sitions. He said his father worked at a factory; that he had been on short hours for a long time, trade was so bad; that his mother washed: they had not often plenty to eat: he could not read; he did not know anything about writing; he went to school once, but not for long: they had not money to spare: he was obliged to go into the streets, and get what he could. Did he go to church? Yes, he went to church, but not till just when the folks were coming out: he went to beg: the people at the Catholic chapel gave most. No; he had never been inside, as he could remember. Would he work? He would be glad to work if he could get anything to do; but he was so little, he could get more begging: though he would rather work. What was his name? John Thackeray. Where did he live? In Fever Yard. Fever Yard? Yes; they gave it that name when the typhus was so bad there; it was a very dirty place: he could shew her where it was; but he had never seen a lady there—never!—and never a gentleman but him that collected the rents every week.

The lad's face was intelligent; his answers to all Maude asked clear and concise. He eyed her eagerly: there was all the acuteness in his face that those street children have. Maude gave him some money, and told him he should be looked after. There were lots worse off than he was, he said; but he should like to work: he could weed, he could pick stones; he liked being about a garden.

Maude promised him help, and she did not forget him. Fever Yard was her own property.

This was the beginning Maude made. It was her first expedition amongst her people, but not her last: they began to know her by sight, and to give her civil greetings as they stood back to let her pass.

On one occasion, her old natural pride got a sharp rebuke, which it never forgot; and which it never ceased to blush over as long as she lived.

She was crossing the bridge on foot. A party of men out of work, with pipes in their mouths, were standing quietly together looking at the craft going up and down the river.

There was nothing coarse or disorderly in either their manner or appearance: they evidently belonged to the better class of artisans; but Maude, in passing them, drew her glittering silk dress, with dainty-gloved hands, close to her, as if she dreaded touching them with the hem of her garment.

One of the men broke into a shout of fierce laughter.

"Ay, madam!" he called out after her; "the kingdom of heaven wont be select enough for the like of you, I'm afraid."

A perfect chorus of laughter greeted this speech, and it rang in Maude's ears long after she was out of sight!

Mrs Powys was a firm coadjutor in all Maude's plans for private relief; and old Martha was her almoner for the very wretched: for those who had no home but the streets. Of her higher schemes, two churches, with schools and houses for the clergymen and teachers, soon grew up in the extensive parish of St Grim's.

A plan was made for the building of houses, which should be of no higher rents than those

where her people lived already; and as these were finished, and the former tenants put into them, the old places were pulled down, and better dwellings erected on their sites.

Reformations are not to be wrought in a day: there were many difficulties to be met, on which Maude had never calculated; but her energies now aroused, she pushed on, doing what she could to repair the past: never flagging, never discouraged; meeting ingratitude with renewed kindness, and thinking none too abject, none too guilty to be raised and aided.

That Christmas at Houghton was very quiet indeed: there were no gaieties whatever; but it was very pleasant notwithstanding, for Colonel Gower was staying with Mr Tempest, and he was to be seen at the Priory daily. Sara Clare told Lady Linnet that Miss Talbot did not let her sister go out at all: she was to be kept in the house till her hair grew: she looked quite a disgrace to the family, shaven

and shorn of her golden honours as she had been. There was somebody who did not think so: somebody who saw in the face of Lettice a higher and more spiritual beauty than it had before possessed, and wondered often how it was that innocent little thing had wound itself so inextricably amongst his heart-strings.

It would be almost impossible to define Mr Tempest's satisfaction, when the marriage of his nephew was talked about. He went about telling everybody that it was to take place in the following autumn: this was correct; but it was rather a breach of confidence in the old gentleman promulgating it so widely, for the information had been confided under the seal of secrecy. He said, in extenuation thereof, that he never could keep a secret in his life, and Lennox knew that when he told him, so that he had nobody but himself to blame.

It had been finally agreed upon, after much discussion, that Lettice should accompany Lennox Gower to India after their marriage. He did not choose to give up his profession; and Lettice did not wish it: he had no idea of

being a half-dependent on the bounty of the proud Lady of Houghton.

Maude was highly indignant at first, and combatted the plan with every argument she could think of. But Lennox stood firm; and at length Maude haughtily gave in, saying, it was perhaps better so: but it did not increase her liking for her future brother-in-law, or reconcile her mind any the more to the sacrifice of her principles. She only avoided him rather, plunging more enthusiastically into her projects for ameliorating the condition of the poor. She spent many a half hour down at her gamekeeper's cottage in the glen, talking to his pretty wife about the things she had seen and done in her town life.

Nellie's experience, her natural shrewdness and kindliness of heart, won for her Miss Talbot's respect; and the story of her father who had died in prison, and of poor Jessie, whom she had heard of in Salford, awakened Maude's entire sympathy.

It was in one of these visits that Nellie learnt her dear sister's condition. Nellie's heart melted

within her; she could scarcely rest till Geoffry came home, and then he drove her into the town, quite as eager as his wife to carry comfort to the dying girl. They found her, as they expected, sadly changed. She had waited for this, she said: she wanted Nellie's forgiveness, and she could die in peace. Marion was with her, but she crept out of the room while this first interview passed: she came back when Nell called her; and the honest creature kissed her, as she would have done another sister, so grateful to her was she for her kindness to Jessie.

Jessie did not last much longer: it seemed, indeed, as if she had only needed this to bid her depart; and one evening, as Nellie and Marion sat by her talking, she died—very quietly and very happily.

It was better so. Nellie could not wish her back: she saw her utterly broken in heart and frame; and she was content to give her again to their common mother, and hide her sin and sorrow under the sacred shelter of the grave. She was not fit to wrestle with the world. They buried her in St Grim's church-

yard, beside her grandfather. Marion went abroad in an emigrant vessel; she is leading a new life in a country which is proving better to her than her own.

Lettice's interest in her sister's works of charity and kindness was great: of the two she was the favourite, in the visits they made to the hamlet amongst the hills and Staunton. There were the additional attractions of gaiety and youth. The people said Miss Talbot was grand, but Miss Lettice was good; and to their thinking that was the better repute. She had a little pet-scheme of her own, which she brought to great perfection after considerable difficulty, and a long warfare with Mr Burr.

This was the establishment of an infant school. The curate wished an old servant of his, not famous for the amenity of her disposition, to be promoted to the post of mistress thereof; but this proposal Lettice negatived decidedly. The school was her school; and

no Mrs Rod should reign lady paramount there: the children who had the happiness to be born under her rule, should not be dragged up through the slime of ignorance, and the tearful avenue of birch that had been the fate of their fathers. They should have the chance of becoming a generation of better men.

Miss Talbot seconded Lettice, and at length Mr Burr yielded, surlily enough. A pretty cottage was built near the church, for the reception of a widow and her daughter, the latter of whom was chosen teacher for the little flock. The mistress was young certainly, but she had a kindly way with her, and was healthy and patient: the main qualities necessary in the management of young children. Lettice said if she could have unmarried Mrs Meynell, Nellie should have had the post; but as that was impossible, and not to be wished either, Mary Lee was a good substitute. The school prospered, as it was sure to do, for Lettice gave it her frequent attention; and there was not a pleasanter thing to see than her bright young face peeping in through the porch in a summer

morning, at the busy, humming little creatures within the school-house.

Many a half-hour she passed, sitting on the low wooden bench, listening to curious baby-reading, and inspecting knitting that frightened Miss Sedley when it was shewn her. Miriam had an interest in the school, too, because it was the work of her old pupil; and she often went there, and relieved Mary Lee from her task of teaching. It was her particular amusement during the absence of Miss Talbot and Lettice in London for the spring; and all her letters teemed with the history of the progress that small Johnnys, and Harrys, and Pollys were making under Mary Lee. She hinted once that perhaps there might be an infant school at Hillside some day, when the people were rather more humanized: she did not think any place so bad as to be beyond the reach of reformation

Whilst Maude was carrying forward those plans which she had drawn up for her people in Salford, there was an idea brooding in her mind for future production. She had casually heard it remarked, that throughout the length

and breadth of England, amongst its hundreds of charitable institutions for the sick, the poor, and the aged, its countless hospitals for every disease under the sun, there was no asylum for the incurables. Those miserable wretches who are afflicted with a disease which can only leave them with life itself, find the doors of hospitals closed against them, when in most need, one would think, of the superior comforts which public charity provides for the suffering.

Maude did not make any research to discover whether the statement she had heard was true or not. There was no such place in Salford: of that she was certain; and the idea which she was nursing was, to erect such an hospital at a few miles out of the town, and endow it for the reception of some of those miserable creatures, whose life-long misery would alone entitle them to it.

This was an idea worth the carrying out. Lettice had her sufficient fortune now: Houghton would be hers, and her children's after her; but in the meantime, the vast yearly income Maude received, would be ample to

work out her schemes. She lived quietly; there were no improvements to make on her estate, no encumbrances to pay off. Maude determined to be a better steward of the talents bestowed upon her than she had been.

Whilst in London, whither she and Lettice proceeded in the end of May, her plan was matured; she found out others with experience greater than her own—men of large hearts and large sympathies, who were both able and willing to give the help of their counsel.

Before Lettice was married, she assisted at the ceremony of laying the foundation-stone of this building; and Maude felt that she was at last engaged in a work, the good of which would live after her.

CHAPTER XII.

SARA IN LOVE.

"Lennox, my good fellow, where are you going?" demanded Mr Tempest, pettishly, as his nephew rose from the breakfast-table immediately he had concluded his meal.

The two were in the bachelor apartments of the Squire in St James's Street; they had been in London together a-week, and Colonel Gower had found his companion somewhat too exacting to be pleasant in domestic life. Lennox replied, that he was going to Talbot House.

"Pshaw, stuff!" hissed the old gentleman, dashing his newspaper down on the carpet: "it is Talbot House for ever! I wish you were fairly married, and then you and Semi-

ramis could go at it tooth and nail: she'll lead you a life, Lennox, depend on't!"

The Colonel laughed and shook his head, as if he meant to insinuate that he was quite a match for the most fractious specimen of womankind. The Squire had had news from the country that did not please him; his gout too, was troublesome, and his coffee was less excellent than usual: altogether the Squire was cross; he wished his nephew would say something that he could contradict, that he might keep him in his company a little longer. It came sooner than he expected.

"Fine, soldierly man that!" observed Lennox, looking up the street after a gentleman who trotted past, mounted on a superb charger.

"What do you see in him?" snarled his uncle, leaning forward: "fine fellow, forsooth! so he is: he was brought up to be a fine fellow—it is his profession: he has traded on it for nine and thirty years. But mind, *I* don't call him a fine fellow! nothing of the sort: he's a younger son, and he lives on an income of something less than nothing a-year. He

rides fine horses—dresses well—lodges well—and lives well; but where the money comes from—God only knows! He's plagued with duns from morning till night, and some people say—mind *I* don't, and I should not wish it to go any further—that he has a trick at cards which is not quite the thing."

"What is his name, sir?" asked Lennox, not much caring for this private history of a man about town; but wishing to bring the conversation to an end, and make his escape.

"Name! why a fellow like that has no name: he's Harry or Dick, or something of that sort; but they called his father Saville," said Mr Tempest. "That man whom you have the bad taste to admire, was the fashion, sir, before you were breeched: he is a blasé old roué now."

The Squire unwarily stooped to pick up his newspaper, and when he raised himself slowly to an erect position, he saw Lennox quietly going out of the room; and the next minute the Colonel mounted his horse, which his groom was holding at the door, and cantered away.

The Talbots had only come up to London

the day before, and Lennox was impatient to see Lettice: they had not met for nearly a month, and though letters passed between them almost daily, that did not suffice him. Maude considered him a very exacting lover indeed, and Sara Clare tried hard to instil a spirit of rebellion into her mind: ineffectually, I am happy to say.

It was very early hours yet for a visit; but Lennox knew Lettice would not take it amiss: indeed, as he dismounted before Talbot House, and glanced up at the windows, he saw her retreating into the further part of the apartment. Had he been a cool man of the world, he would have laughed internally at this sign of the love she bore him, and might have tried to pique her by making her wait for his arrival a little longer. But he did neither; he followed Saunders up stairs, and as he entered the room, found himself not with Lettice only, as he had hoped and expected, but in the midst of a party of ladies, whose flutter of astonishment politely indicated to him that they considered his untimely visit an intrusion.

There were Miss Sara Clare and Lady Linnet, Miss Talbot, Lettice, and another lady, who was introduced to him as Madame du Bourg: a friend of Miss Clare, Lettice whispered. There had evidently been a sociable family discussion going forward, which he had interrupted; but the little bird at his ear soon made him *au fait* of all that had occurred.

A most extraordinary thing had happened to Sara Clare, and it was being discussed in full family conclave: she had had a fortune left her, and had got a lover! Lennox briefly ejaculated, "Nonsense!" but Lettice persisted it was true. The lover was a very well known and fashionable individual; his name was Saville—Captain Saville.

"The very man I saw this morning going to Sir James's on the same errand as I come here," said Lennox to himself; and then he recollected that Saville could not be so fortunate, as his ladye love was absent from her paternal nest, making proclamation of the honours that had fallen on her late in life.

There was a peculiar expression in Sara's

face, delicious to behold: she held her head up and cast down her eyes; and, Lettice said wickedly, looked so charmingly antiquated. Lettice wondered what her *futur* was like. Lennox described him to her, and then made inquiries respecting the fortune she had mentioned; for it was well known that Sir James Clare could not have much to give. Lettice explained that it came from her godmother, who had never taken the slightest notice of Sara during her lifetime: never given her the value of a pin, as Sara herself expressed it, and whom they had all been abusing most ungratefully for the space of half an hour. Lettice and her sister had been invited to be bridesmaids.

"I think Miss Lettice has not slept well last night; she is rather pale this morning," observed Madame du Bourg, turning suddenly round and interrupting the almost tête-à-tête which she and Lennox were holding in one of the windows, with her back towards which Madame du Bourg had been sitting.

"That graceful langour is peculiarly becoming to her, *I* think, whispered Lady Juliet

Linnet to Miss Talbot. Lady Linnet could afford to be good-natured now.

"Ah, me! she is beautiful, always beautiful!" sighed the widow, thinking of her own declining charms, to which "les cheveux teints, et le rouge et blanc végétal" of her toilette, failed to add the sunny bloom of youth.

"Yes," said Lennox, in a low voice to the French lady, who began to appear almost tolerable in his eyes from the meed of praise she accorded to his Lettice. "Yes—you are right; she is always beautiful: Miss Clare serves as a foil."

Madame du Bourg laughed, and shrugged her shoulders pleasantly.

"Les Clares n'ont pas l'air de société: cette pauvre Lady Juliet, à toujours l'air chiffoné!"

"I should think from the movement of her head, she is giving Miss Talbot a description of her last fête," replied Lennox, contrary to his usual habit, indulging in a little ill-natured gossip.

"Ah, oui, she told it to me yesterday: I was quite weary of the flowers and the dia-

monds, the dancing and the supper. I said to her, 'Miladi, was the entertainment lighter than the details of it?' 'No! oh, no!' repliqua-t-elle, 'it was long and solid: no inexpensive affair, I do assure you, Madame du Bourg.' 'Je le crois bien, Miladi!' repondis-je en lui tournant le dos. 'Ah! je n'aime pas Lady Juliet!'"

The volubility with which the Frenchwoman uttered this harangue, would have astonished any body. Lennox was amazed: although from her appearance he might have conjectured what would be her manners and style of conversation.

"Were you at Lady Lauderdale's on Tuesday, Colonel Gower?" asked Miss Clare, from the sofa where she had been sitting, wearying Miss Talbot with a minute description of what "that dear Saville" said to her, and "what a perfect darling he was."

Colonel Gower replied that he was there; that it was a charming ball.

"I am told Lady Lauderdale looked very ill —was it the case?" asked Lady Juliet.

" I thought her beautiful as ever, and as fascinating," replied Lennox Gower.

" I cannot say that I admired her, though she did take immensely at first," observed Miss Sara Clare, throwing a languid glance round the room, very suitable to her position as a bride-elect.

" She is affected," added Madame du Bourg. " I hate lint-white locks, blue eyes, and lily complexions,—they are so very insipid."

" It is a delicate point to discuss in so fair a company," returned the Colonel, smiling, as he looked from one to the other of the quizzing circle.

" She may well have the good word of you gentlemen," said Madame du Bourg, with some asperity.

" No scandal, no scandal, pray !" cried a jovial voice, at the door, and in came Sir James Clare. " What witty, beautiful, and accomplished dame are you bemauling now ?"

" The vain and coquettish Lady Lauderdale," replied Madame du Bourg.

" As well impeach Minerva herself !" exclaimed Sir James.

"Not coquettish; no, certainly: Lady Lauderdale is not coquettish!" said Lettice, quietly.

"The French lady looked up in astonishment at this unexpected antagonist; but, as Lettice was not annihilated by the lightning of her glance, she tried the wit of a tongue that had done to death many a character, upon her, never fearing that the shrinking, modest, little Lettice, could turn upon her.

"Ah, ah! Miss Lettice, vous êtes si espiegle!" she exclaimed, affecting to believe that she had spoken satirically.

"We know Lady Lauderdale well; and I assure you most sincerely, that she is quite free from all levity of word or action!" said Lettice bravely, but flushing as she felt that Lennox Gower was watching her.

Madame du Bourg reddened, even through her rouge; for she saw that Sir James Clare and the Colonel were both enjoying her discomfiture by one whom she considered a foolish, unformed little girl.

"I cannot think, my dear young lady, that your experience qualifies you for a judge in

such matters!" said the Frenchwoman, blandly, while her heart was burning with vexation, and her black eyes twinkled angrily.

"Suffer me to ask how often you have had opportunities of judging her yourself, Madame du Bourg?" asked Lettice; who seemed to have abandoned her shyness, and become a match in the wordy war for the fair widow herself.

"I have never seen her; but by report I know her well," boldly replied Madame.

"Ah! if you knew what report said of *you*, you would not believe it: I do not. Only think, Sir James," said Lettice, turning to the Baronet, "yesterday we were told that Madame du Bourg was fifty at least; and to-day, we receive ocular demonstration from her black ringlets and blooming face, that she is very, very much younger—nearer fifteen, indeed."

Madame du Bourg laughed hysterically at this audacious bit of satire; and when she had uttered it, Lettice felt half afraid to look Maude in the face. Sir James Clare whispered to Colonel Gower that it was nuts to him: he could not endure that odious, be-

ringletted, painted Madame whom his womankind had taken up. To Colonel Gower's great relief, the entire Clare family took their departure shortly after, and at last he had Lettice to himself; for Maude, whom this early irruption into her household had disarranged materially, departed to her private room, on the usual plea of business-letters to write. It was true enough. Her correspondence was very extensive; indeed she was often glad to get Miss Sedley's assistance to help her through with it.

Lennox's first words to Lettice, when they were alone, were—what do you think? actually a reproach for the attack on Madame du Bourg. Lettice coloured, and her lover could see that there was a struggle going forward in her breast, between the knowledge that he was right and her dislike to being found fault with by him. Lettice was thinking of Sara Clare's whispers, and almost wishing to put her advice in practice; but, glancing up into the kindly eyes bent down on her so gravely, she did not dare to be wilful, and it ended by her confessing herself wrong, and promising to

curb the naughty little spirit within her for the future. What would Madame du Bourg have said to such a concession?

" We are going to the Clare's to-morrow night, to meet this Captain Saville. Do you know anything of him?" asked Lettice, after their personal communications were disposed of.

Colonel Gower repeated what Mr Tempest had told him; and so far as the old Squire's description went, it was tolerably correct. But while Lettice Talbot and her lover discuss that and other matters, we will present to our readers the late-come wooer of Miss Sara Clare. How astonished all her friends were, and her mother especially, when it became likely that she was not to wither away a dejected spinster in the family mansion, shall be left to the imagination : their surprise was only exceeded by their delight.

Captain Saville had a charm in his manner that everybody acknowledged—a freeness, a frankness: all assumed, it is true, but still marvellously fascinating, and welcome everywhere. He had not naturally a bad heart,

but the world and its ways of evil were so familiar to him, that he felt a profound contempt for goodness; which he only deemed another name for hypocrisy. When he heard of a generous action, he set it down as a fable, or a monstrosity, out of the common course of nature, and the like of which might never again occur. From twenty to twenty-five, he had been the cicerone of the ball-room; from twenty-five to his present age, the habitué of clubs. He now appeared in a fresh character —that of the man of substantial means on the look out for a wife. This, I would have it understood, was his public character; but his compeers, deeply versed as himself in the art of living upon their wits, knew well that the golden Pactolus of the gaming table had flowed less freely than was its wont, and that unless some means, such, for instance, as a rich wife, could be found to prop the declining fortunes of the man of pleasure, his sun must shortly set. He was endowed with a most comfortable degree of assurance, inconquerable self-possession, and courage beyond a question—qualities which, he knew by much expe-

rience, to be of inestimable value in the pursuit he was about to undertake. He began to look about for an heiress who might release his prisoned pleasures and draw him out from temporary eclipse, in a new and resplendent character—as " Benedict, the married man."

Just at this juncture, that unnatural old woman, godmother to Sara Clare, died; and the world got up one morning to hear the news that that sharp-visaged spinster was the heiress to seven thousand a-year. She was encircled with the golden halo, and deified at once. Her person was invested with charms hitherto ignored; her temper was discovered to be spirited; her disposition generous and feminine. That she longed to be married had been a jest for years: now, it was who should be first in the field. Saville had it. He had known Sir James Clare in some remote times, and it was easy for a man of his kind to renew an intimacy, if there were motive sufficient to make it desirable. It is not to be supposed for one instant that the popular Captain Saville considered Sara Clare

as anything but an incumbrance; he wanted to marry her fortune, and he would take her in, rather than lose the bargain.

The wooing had been short; and the settlement of the affair thoroughly business-like between Saville and Sir James Clare. But Sara, with a perversity characteristic of long-waiting spinsters, immediately conceived a "grande passion" for her mature lover, and a passion seemingly so real, that Madame du Bourg, who was for the present her most valued friend, took upon herself to speak on the subject: the youthful airs Sara gave herself made such a course warrantable. The lively French lady took her to task on the morning following the scene described in the early part of the chapter. The two were sitting in the pleasant seclusion of Lady Clare's boudoir, in all the luxury of dishabille. Madame du Bourg's dishabille was the most coquettish that could be imagined; but it was well that she had taken the precaution to draw the rose-coloured curtains so as to exclude the glare of a bright June sun, for its bold, uncompromising lustre would assuredly have

brought to light all the innocent little contrivances of which she made use for the perpetuation of her youthful appearance.

Sara had been for sometime steadily contemplating herself in a long mirror just before the couch where she lay, with half-closed eyes, enacting the *fiancée* to perfection. Madame du Bourg felt aggravated; she did not like to see one of her sex so silly: she had eyes for the folly of other people, though, poor woman, she was stone-blind to her own. There was as much malice as friendly feeling, therefore, in the tone she took with Sara. The defection of Saville on the evening before, when he had promised to be of her party to the Opera, gave her good ground to begin on.

Sara had his note in her hand, and was glancing at the signature now and then, with the sentimental tenderness of fifteen.

"What is that, my love—another billet from your *fiancé?*" asked Madame du Bourg. (She knew well enough what it was—but she never acted in a straightforward way.)

"No; it is his note of yesterday," replied Sara, softly. If Madame had not been look-

ing so keen and satirical, she would have pressed the paper to her lips. "He ought to be here now: I gave orders for him to be sent up when he came."

"What did he say, my dear? I forget," asked the widow: though she remembered distinctly.

"Dearest Sara,

"I cannot accompany you to the Opera to-night, for I am compelled to leave town immediately. I am uncertain when I can return (not to-day, certainly); but I hope to see you to-morrow. Eternally yours,

"HARRY SAVILLE."

"Quel drôle de chose!" ejaculated Madame du Bourg, holding the perfumed note, which Sara had given her, between her finger and thumb, and contemplating it with an air of commiseration and wonder.

"You English lovers are incomprehensible creatures, I do say," she observed, laughing. "To-day they come and protest all sort of vows—theyare hanging between life and death —they plant the hand upon the heart and

sigh: to-morrow they go away, quite free as air—not even saying where they go, and leaving the lady to suppose they may never come back! Helas! but your men are as inconstant as your climate! I would not divide one small section of my heart among one dozen of them! Ils ne saveut pas être amoureux! Bah!" With this expletive, the harangue ended.

Sara looked flushed and angry. She changed her attitude of studied elegance for one of her natural, strong-minded, bolt-upright positions, and told Madame du Bourg she did not know Captain Saville.

"Know him, my love! I know him this twenty year!" exclaimed the widow, startled out of herself, or she would not have made such an admission; for her age was supposed to hover somewhere about the charmed regions of thirty. (What long years those are in some women's lives, those years between eight-and-twenty and forty!) "Well, perhaps, not so long as that; but I have met him in societé ever since I came to England. If he were my lover, instead of yours, I should soon know how to make him repent."

"But, Madame, I have not your admirable coolness," retorted Sara.

"You let him make his peace too easily, my love," the Frenchwoman resumed: "be cold, and if he attempt to retaliate, break with him entirely—he will soon be at your feet, all submission. Maintain your dignity in every case; and, above all, do not allow him to believe he has a paramount interest in your heart. It is rather unfortunate that you have conceived a 'grande passion' for a man who can put his lover's airs off and on as easily as a glove."

"You are harsh in your judgment, Madame," replied Sara, considerably piqued.

"No, no! I know the world!" exclaimed the widow; "and you must not be angry, my dear Miss Clare, if I tell you the truth about him: he wants for a wife, an heiress; it is not so much Sara Clare as her fortune he does covet: he is an intriguant; and you being *rather* young, are easily deceived in him. If you were to lose your money, you would also lose him. And I would like to warn you that, if he should meet another richer than you, he

will most likely, as they say, jilt you. If it *should* happen, you must not seem to care, or the world will laugh at you. A 'grande passion à votre age, mon amie—c'est une chose inconcevable !' "

"Madame, we manage these things differently in England," replied the bride-elect, with an assumption of dignity that was quite lost on the gay widow.

"Yes, I know—people make all kinds of jests of disappointed women," said she, sadly ; as if she had undergone that discipline herself : which most probably she had; for she was notoriously on the look-out for a rich "parti" on whom to confer her carefully-preserved charms.

"A disappointed affection has always bad effects on the health and good looks of girls. I once had a 'grande passion'—I was only sixteen—pour un homme de la cour. Ah ! il était si beau ! Il me traitait d'enfant, et moi je l'aimais passionément. Ma mère pénétra le mystère, elle m'entraina de Paris—hélas je ne le vis jamais plus! il fût tué en duel! J'épousai Monsieur du Bourg—mais—"

An expressive wave of the head concluded the sentence; and the widow put up her embroidered handkerchief to conceal the eyes where tears were not.

"They talk of broken hearts in England!" she went on, after this little display was over. "My heart was indeed broken. I wandered about from morning to night. Je ne pensais qu'à-lui. Je me rappelle le moment où j'éntendis la nouvelle de sa mort. "Il y a eu un duel, et Monsieur Argentine est tué:" me dit ma mère. Je jettai un seul cri perçant, et je tombai à ses pieds, privée de la vie. Ah, Miss Sara! ce que c'est qu'un 'disappointment'!" And again the handkerchief, redolent of esprit de violette, was in requisition.

Sara sate through these reminiscences with admirable fortitude: she had got accustomed to Madame's lachrymose effusions; and, knowing whither they always tended, gave up her mind and her eyes to the interesting study of her own person and dress in the mirror aforementioned. Her confidence in Saville was proof against all Madame had said; and though she was impatiently wondering why he did not

come, she carefully avoided letting it betray her into any expression of annoyance. After her fashion, Sara Clare was a good actress, and had not much to learn from the wily Parisienne.

Meanwhile, poor Lady Clare sat in her drawing-room, listening to one of those newsmongers of society, who, on all grand occasions, contrive to win a way into the domestic circle for the purpose of gathering materials for carrying on their profession.

Lady Clare allowed herself to be sifted thoroughly. She was proud of Sara's accession of fortune, and proud of the conquest she had made of the uuiversally-admired Saville. But, poor woman! one thing she did say, which she ought to have had the sense and tact to keep quiet—she acknowledged that Sarah's fortune was in reality something less than half of the sum rumour had proclaimed; and worse, that the will under which she inherited, was likely to be contested by the son of the lady who had made Sara her heiress. But the fashionable mother said it would be

of but little consequence if the suit were lost, as Captain Saville was a man of such good estate. Her visitor, who was better informed, plied her with questions until she had elicited every grain of information that Lady Clare could give. She learnt that the will which bequeathed to Sara Clare all the real and personal property, landed estates, &c. of old Mrs Pemberton, bore the date of twenty years back; that Mrs Pemberton had quarrelled with her son at that time, and disinherited him for her goddaughter; and that there was said to be another will in existence, executed in the preceding year, which completely revoked the first.

While Lady Clare was innocently undermining all her daughter's prospects of matrimonial felicity, Saville arrived; late, but perhaps for that all the more welcome. Once in the presence of his *fiancée*, escape was impossible; Sara was tender and exacting; she had a thousand little communications to make, and a thousand questions to ask, which nobody but Harry could answer.

Madame du Bourg left them to each other's sweet society, on which hers would have been a restraint. Of course, Saville was bored—horribly bored. It was really no joke making love to a sharp, angular woman of forty, who was resolutely bent on being charming.

Saville was as blind as a bat to all her lures, but he filled his part decently; paid her a few extravagant compliments; wished he could marry her out of hand and have done with it; and only yawned once, as he leant over her chair. He made two or three abortive attempts to talk about her property, the most interesting of subjects to him; but Sara, who, whatever her faults were, was not mercenary, always turned the conversation back on the tender topic of their mutual attachment. If any humorous, fun-loving caricaturist could have looked through the rose-coloured curtains at the antiquated lovers, he would have seen a delicious subject for the exercise of his talents. Saville was keenly sensible of the absurdity; but he was playing for a high stake, and dared not rebel against the silken leash with which

it was his lady love's pleasure to encircle him.

The weather was excessively hot, and the visitor of Lady Clare, who had so skilfully pumped her of what she little wished all the world to know, had a very hard day's work in disseminating her news; going from house to house, dropping here a grain and there a grain. It is not difficult to know how rapidly those germs of ill tidings blossom and bring forth fruit. Before six o'clock in the evening, everybody knew that the great Clare fortune was a sham:—everybody but the hapless Saville, who having passed an hour or two in the boudoir, had then been inveigled into driving his fair *fiancée* out into the country: which, she had softly observed, would be more fascinating than ever in his dear company.

Anything was better than that stuffy boudoir; so Saville yielded to the tender insinuation, and went off in search of rural pleasures; while the friends to whom he owed money, and his few intimates who really liked him, were running all over the town in search of

him; that they might give him timely warning of the noose into which he was going to put himself. Their benevolent intentions were frustrated, for the drive was long. Saville dined at Sir James's, and it was in the firm assurance that a month would see him a free man, as regarded his debts, that he sat down, the glory of the family party. He had not wasted his time: Sara had been prevailed on to fix a very early day for their marriage; and Saville had declared himself blessed before all men.

It was not until he ran off to his bachelor apartments to have a little rest before the tedium of Lady Clare's reception, that he learned the position in which he stood. At first sight, it was perfectly horrifying; but at the second, matters looked less awful: the deed was not yet done; while there is life there is hope: he went to the soirée, trusting to his guardian genius to extricate him from his scrape.

CHAPTER XIII.

DISAPPOINTMENTS.

Lady Clare's rooms were well filled before Captain Saville made his appearance amongst the fashionable crowd. Sara's popularity of a day had fallen off amazingly already; nearly everybody there had heard whispers of the mystical nature of her fortune, and many had come, actuated by the laudable curiosity of seeing how she looked on it. Their spite was not gratified in the least: Sara appeared thoroughly content in her dress of rustling moire antique: *she* knew nothing of the ill-natured remarks that were circulating around her. She had established herself in great state in the furthest room of the suite; and thither people flocked as if to pay court

to a queen. Sara took it so, and she felt herself to be worthy of the homage.

Miss Talbot was beside her on the couch: she never danced, and always sought out a quiet nook to wile away the night, or from which to watch Lettice.

Madame du Bourg, painted and perfumed, conferred the light of her countenance on the group, and occasionally attracted a stray gentleman to listen to her *minauderies*.

Lettice was enjoying herself thoroughly: she had not a care in the world. Lennox Gower was there, always at hand to talk to her, and she looked as beautiful as her sister had proudly expected and hoped she would. There were many men fluttering about her, whom Maude would have preferred far before Lennox Gower for her husband; but even she acknowledged, that so far as appearance went, he had the advantage over most of them: and of nothing else was she likely to be a true, because a prejudiced judge.

Lennox was satisfied and happy; if he had not been so, he would have proved himself ungrateful in the very highest degree. Lettice

was gay and gracious, animated and pleasant to everybody; but for him were reserved those fleeting blushes—those sudden tremors—those tell-tale conscious eyes, which betrayed the love she took no pains to hide.

Madame du Bourg looked after her with enthusiastic admiration.

"Ah, Miss Talbot! your sister is the loveliest creature I have ever seen since I came to England," said the French lady, bending forward, and exhibiting through her smiling lips a range of the whitest (false) teeth that ever decked a rosy mouth. "I venture to predict, that she will be the fashion—the rage: Captain Saville, what do you say?"

"I say she is purely beautiful," replied the Captain, boldly.

He had been lounging for some time through the rooms, and had at last anchored by his susceptible Sara, who did not spare him; telling him he was late, wondering what had detained him so long at home, and secretly wishing he would ask her to dance: an attention which he shewed no signs of paying. He was tired, he said; and how close the rooms were! Did not

Madame du Bourg find the heat quite oppressive? Madame gave him the benefit of her teeth, and fanned herself assiduously. Then Captain Saville relapsed into silence: he was growing moody. Sara kept him so closely under her wing, that he began to think how difficult it would be to escape from her careful tenderness, and what a heavy yoke it was. There were none of his set that he could see in the rooms; and, having excused himself from dancing with Sara on the plea of fatigue, he could not offer himself to anybody else: though he would have been very glad to confer the distinction of his notice on the fair Lettice Talbot. There was he obliged to stay, bound, as it were, hand and foot, by the side of Sara. Madame du Bourg was a little relief, not much; and as for Miss Talbot, she sat like a fine statue of resignation, never uttering a word, but watching the moving figures through the open doors, as listlessly as if they were in a puppet-show.

"That girl is pretty," said Saville, with an ill-disguised yawn, looking at a lady in blue who had come into the apartment where they

were, leaning on the arm of an elderly gentleman of city substantiality.

"Assez bien, mais bourgeoise!" commented the French lady, eyeing the girl all over with a glance that took in every particular of her dress.

"Yes, he is only a merchant: Sir William Cresswell; but papa has a respect for him: he is enormously wealthy: that girl is his daughter," explained Miss Clare, languidly.

Saville pricked up his ears, and gave his best attention to the new comers.

"She is more than pretty," he said, affecting to fall into a fever of admiration, which piqued Sara excessively: so keenly indeed, that she betrayed it.

"Beauty is but a grain in popular favour now," she said, with an air of lofty superiority. "I have seen married women, and single ones too, with only passable faces and very indifferent figures, win crowds of admirers by a charming manner."

Sara flattered herself that she possessed that qualification in an eminent degree.

Captain Saville grew more restless every moment, and at last he rose suddenly, and said he must go: he really could not endure the atmosphere any longer; and before Sara had time to remonstrate, he had pressed her hand and vanished: his business of disentangling the meshes of the net into which he had got, not advanced one whit. If he had known what old gentleman was doing him good service in that particular, he would have blessed him with the best blessing he had.

Mr Tempest had got Sir James Clare up into a corner, and was giving him a little insight into the private life of his intended son-in-law, which threatened to make the worthy Baronet apoplectic, so purple did his jovial countenance become.

"He's at the gaming-table night by night," said Mr Tempest, energetically; "and for all his worldly possessions, I would not give my old shoe! He's nothing better than a certificated pauper: if your girl marry him, she's ruined."

Sir James listened, aghast.

"He's to be met with on every race-course

in the kingdom. I say, Sir James, did you ever hear of him before Miss Sara's fine fortune came to be talked of?"

"Never a word!" gasped Sir James; and then with a sudden sense of relief, he went on—"but if he wanted to marry her for that" (and the the Baronet shrewdly suspected there was no other assignable reason), "he may turn about and leave her to-morrow, for not a rap will she ever see of old Madam Pemberton's savings. I took the opinion of counsel about the wills yesterday, and they said there was nothing for our case to stand upon: the last will was decidedly genuine. Well, I don't mind confessing I was a little bit disappointed at the time; but if this loss delivers her from her engagement to that rascal, I shall not care."

"He's a *very* honest fellow in his way, I daresay," began Mr Tempest, after his usual plan of contradicting all he had said before: "he's good-natured and gentlemanlike—a very pleasant man indeed: he may come into property, if his eldest brother and his six sons—fine noble lads they are—should happen to die!"

Sir James groaned aloud at this remote chance of a fortune so pleasantly set before his fatherly imagination.

"I would not have you to think that *I* wish to say anything against him: he's as good as eight out of every ten of the young men of the present day; only it is rather awkward to have an extravagant, penniless son-in-law."

Sir James knew that from the Whimper incubus: his purse could not supply two drains of that sort.] Sara's engagement must be broken off at any risk: she would be cross; but that did not much matter: Sara always was cross. The Baronet edged his way through the throng to the room where his daughter was, intending to give her a hint there and then; but seeing his aversion, Madame du Bourg, deep in conversation with her, he changed his mind, and resolved to depute his wife to give her the intelligence he had received.

"Well, my dear," the amiable Frenchwoman was saying, "I hope you admire the style in which your lover treats you? He has left you, and there, I vow, he stands talking to that baby-faced Miss Cresswell: he has found some

one to introduce him; and no doubt Sir William will invite him to dinner in a week, and then—"

Sara tossed her head.

"Madame du Bourg, do you imagine I can be jealous of a person like that?" replied Sara, with an ineffable sneer.

"You know it is Saville's boast that he can bring any one into fashion: his notice might avail even a city knight's daughter," persisted the widow; "and when she gets over her girlish shyness, she will be a very presentable person."

"You heard him say he was tired and heated: this room is close: the Talbots are gone too—many people are gone," said Sara, not too certain of her lover to think he could spare her defence of his behaviour to her.

"Oh, the Talbots!—that is no criterion; they are always the last to come, and the first to go."

And as Madame du Bourg spoke, she rose to depart also. Sara went with her through the rooms, which were rapidly thinning, feeling rather discontented, but glad that she had

allowed herself to be prevailed on to fix the day for her marriage.

When the last carriage had rolled away from the door, and the ball-room was utterly deserted, Sara stood by the fire, with her elbow on the mantel-piece for a few minutes. Sir James and her mother were near her; and the Baronet was evidently urging his spouse to make some communication to their reflective daughter. But Lady Clare was sleepy: she yawned portentously, saying, "To-morrow, my dear, to-morrow!" and so went off to bed with her distasteful mission unperformed. She was a very wise woman; Sara was not in the humour to bear any further irritation until she had had a night's rest.

When Sara Clare opened her drowsy eyes next morning, it was to see the rain beating against the windows; she instantly lapsed into a very unpleasant state of mind. She had hinted to Captain Saville how dearly she should like their country drive to be repeated; he had half promised to come and take her out again; and now this odious rain completely upset the scheme. But no matter: the morn-

ing in the shady boudoir would be almost as pleasant.

The life that Sara Clare's maid had lived since her mistress was engaged to be married, was only one degree better than negro slavery. The new dresses, the dresses to be altered; the hail-storm of bonnets, flowers, feathers, that came into her department, was awful. Every day there were changes to be made in them, and they never gave satisfaction: the maid said it was because Miss Clare looked ugly in everything that she liked nothing; and she compared notes with Aimée respecting their mistress' characters, which left an immense amount of credit to the Talbots.

On this particular morning Sara was more difficult to please than ever. No less than four different dresses did she put on, causing her unhappy Abigail to strain her wrist in fastening them. The last of the four looked worse than the first; so it was pulled off again, and Miss Clare sat down to reflect what she really would wear, while the maid stood ruefully by, wondering in what sort of a gown that lathey shape and bony face could look well. Sara was certainly

not in beauty. She never had a good complexion; and, as she grew older, it had darkened to a dull, red hue, as deep on the forehead as on the cheeks: indeed pervading her whole countenance. This, united to her pale hair, eyes, and eyelashes, made her a very plain woman; but no amount of study had enlightened her as to that fact, and her devotion to dress was greater than ever.

At last, to her attendant's relief, she was fully equipped in the dress which was least becoming, and she went down to her mamma's boudoir in a temper which promised no great things for that lady's comfort.

Lady Clare was cosily sipping her coffee by the fire when her daughter entered, and thinking how best to open the disclosure which her husband had ordered her to make. It was all the more unpleasant to begin, as she was pre-assured of defeat. Sara Clare, her mother firmly believed, would marry a roué, a gambler, or worse, rather than die an old maid: of all the bad names that can be applied to womankind, this was the worst in Sara's estimation. No wonder

she tried so hard to put herself out of its reach. From her childhood upwards, this had been her creed: it is the first duty of woman to get married—to marry well, if possible, but at any risk to marry. Lady Clare had inculcated this doctrine, and here she was laid under the commands of her liege lord to undo her own work, and to bring back to her bosom a cross, ill-tempered daughter, whom she had been flattering herself she was about to see transferred to another domestic hearth. Lady Clare sighed dismally.

"It is a morning to make any one low," observed Sara, looking out from the window on the dripping trees and deserted alleys of the Park.

"I hope Captain Saville will come early; I want his assistance in copying a drawing Madame du Bourg lent me.

Lady Clare coughed, sipped her coffee slowly, and surveyed her daughter through half-closed, but very scrutinizing eyes.

"Sara, your father has deputed me to speak to you about Captain Saville: he has heard some reports about him that make it very

clear he is no fit connection for our family," said the elder lady, setting down her cup, and leaning back in her chair, to go through the coming contest with as much comfort to herself as possible.

"Nonsense, mother!" ejaculated Sara, sharply, throwing herself on the couch, to the utter discomposure of her ringlets. "Papa has been listening to that detestable Madame du Bourg; she was telling me things I did not want to hear yesterday."

"Sara, love, I thought you and Madame du Bourg were intimate friends," said Lady Clare, in a tone of surprise.

"Oh! we are often intimate friends with people we detest," was the reply.

"Well, my dear, you are right, I daresay; you always were a shrewd girl: but to go on with Captain Saville. He games, and he has not a farthing in the world: it was your money he was after; and now, you know, that is gone, it is impossible you can marry."

"That depends on *us*, I should imagine," said Sara, haughtily; for the first time uniting herself and the Captain in a personal pronoun,

with a very strong accent on it to make it more forcible.

"You will not surely wait, Sara, for him to jilt you?" said Lady Clare.

"Certainly not. I do not believe he will: there is a strong attachment between us, independent of all mercenary considerations," replied Sara, with a superior smile.

"Fiddle-dee-dee!—how can you be so silly at your age, Sara?" exclaimed her mother, exasperated at the infatuated folly of her first-born. "He does not care a straw for you: and never did. He is over head and ears in debt; and as you cannot extricate him from his difficulties, he will give you the go-bye, and marry some rich widow, or vulgar trader's daughter. I am ashamed to think, Sara, after the training you have had, that you should care for a man like that. I have not a doubt, if we could look into his private thoughts at this moment, we should see him reflecting how he could most easily disembarrass himself of you. Now do, Sara, hear reason: you are not too old to marry even after this chance is lost. Write

to him, and say that the engagement must cease: if you don't, depend upon it he will find the means of ridding himself of you; and that will be no feather in your cap. You might as well have the *éclat* of refusing the brilliant and popular Captain Saville as not."

This point of view was worth considering; but Sara was spared any long exercise of her reflective powers by the abrupt entrance of her father.

The Baronet looked rosy and shining, in spite of the depressing morning: he was visibly chuckling over some great and recent gratification. He came forward to the fire, and placed himself before it in that firm and thoroughly British constitutional attitude, without which, I verily believe, English gentlemen think the world would cease to go round.

"I've had Saville here, mamma!" he said, growing more facetious-looking than ever.

"Why does he not come up?" asked Sara, crossly.

"I'm going to tell you, my dear," replied her father, gaily. "He has been laying before me a statement of his embarrassments, and

fidgetting through a long tirade of excuses, the upshot of which was, that he wanted to back out of marrying you: no great compliment—eh! Sara? I did not help him with a single word: I let him stammer and stutter through it as he could. I dare bet a hundred pounds, that the fashionable puppy never felt so completely confounded; and he never can have looked more of a fool than he has been doing for the last half-hour, explaining to an old country squire why he can't marry his daughter. But he is gone, Sara; and it is a good riddance: I wish you joy of your escape!"

"It is a barbarous shame!" said Sara, as well as she could speak for rage. "You have all been in a conspiracy against me;" and the irate spinster flung out of the boudoir, and up to her own room, where she gave vent to her mortification in a fit of tears.

In exactly one month from that date, Captain Saville led to the altar the pretty Miss Cresswell; and his father-in-law becoming bankrupt the following year, he was dragged down by the falling city tower, and extin-

guished for ever, to the eyes of the great world, under its ignoble ruins.

The defection of Captain Saville left Sara Clare in the exact position in which she had come up to London. Every season had thus seen new hopes born and perish. The sight of Lettice Talbot was become gall and wormwood to her: she could not bear the sight of the fresh, girlish face, smiling in the full assurance of happiness to come; and she betook herself almost entirely to the society of Madame du Bourg, who, now that her predictions were verified, abstained from making any triumphant allusions to her foresight; and comforted the disappointed spinster by abusing her ci-devant lover, and relating little anecdotes of the *gaucherie* of his bourgeoise wife.

Sara's disappointment was a family calamity: she inflicted it on every individual connected with her by blood, and she invariably

asserted that Saville had not left her of his own free-will, but through the machinations of other people. Who "other people" were, she did not state; but she enacted the injured and suffering individual to such perfection, that Sir James talked of spending the autumn in Italy; and her much-enduring maid gave warning and left. There was only one faint gleam of pleasure through all her vexation, and that was, her being invited to Houghton for Lettice Talbot's wedding, which was to take place in August. Sara dearly loved the eclât of a wedding, the first part in which it appeared she was destined never to play; but, in the meantime, there was no need to be constantly reminded of her own disappointment by coming in contact with Colonel Gower's fiancée; so she kept out of her way: to their mutual comfort.

Poor Lady Clare visited Tunbridge Wells, for the sole purpose, it was believed, of escaping the perpetual clang of Sara's tongue: at least good-natured people said so.

Mr Tempest divided his time pretty equally between his club and his valet. He was in a

state of the highest satisfaction at the approaching marriage of his nephew; and so he began to vaunt the pleasures of bachelorhood, and to decry conjugal felicity.

Lennox heard and contradicted his uncle daily, but it was out of his power to offend him. Mr Tempest considered his nephew a very clever, sensible fellow, in reality; though he feigned to doubt it, and plagued him no little about Semiramis.

On the last day in town, Sara Clare made her appearance at Talbot House, for the purpose of inspecting the trousseau prepared for Lettice. Her eyes positively filled with tears when the delicate brussels lace veil was held up for her admiration: she could not speak for a few seconds. Lettice quite felt for her; wondering by what law it was that a woman whose whole soul and energy had been devoted to the enterprise of getting a husband, should be so completely and hopelessly defeated.

The wreath of orange blossom was another pang to Sara's susceptible bosom: she insisted on placing it on the head of its future wearer.

Lettice, blushing, granted her that trifling gratification, and the spinster stood contemplating her with clasped hands.

"Colonel Lennox Gower has eyes and taste," she observed, admiration getting the better of disappointment and spleen, as she looked at the innocent face under the flowers. "Oh, Miss Talbot! how can you let her go away to that detestable India; her complexion is sure to suffer. She would have half the world at her feet next season, if Colonel Gower could be prevailed on to leave her to reap her honours as a bride."

"Half the world would be very much in the way, then. I am not used to worship," replied Lettice, laughing, as she removed the wreath and laid it aside.

"Oh, fie! how can you say so!" exclaimed Sara. "I have often remarked that the Colonel looked as if he should like to put you in his pocket out of sight when other men came about you."

"Well, if that is an act of worship, I should have remonstrated against it with all my might!" retorted Lettice.

"Nonsense, child! you know I was speaking—" Sara was not sure whether she ought to say metaphorically or metaphysically—so she made an inaudible murmur, which did as well. Sara went on with the examination of silks and satins, and laces, with the soul of a milliner; feeling the substance of this material and calculating the price of that, until she had made out that nothing short of a thousand pounds could have been expended in the purchase of this trousseau, which was to waste its sweetness and beauty on the desert airs of India. "It would have made a stone feel," she regretfully observed.

Sara also thought it quite a pity that the marriage was not to be solemnized in London instead of at Houghton: she did not like people to hide themselves away: for her part, if she were going to be married, it should certainly be at St George's. Did not Miss Talbot think that a marriage amongst the aristocracy should be celebrated with the greatest publicity and splendour? Miss Talbot replied that it was her sister's wish, and also that of Colonel Gower, to be married at Houghton;

she herself also considered it preferable: but she knew many persons who held Miss Clare's opinion.

As the time approached for her sister's marriage, Maude's dislike thereto, if possible, increased: all the preparations were constantly intruding upon her, until at last she was sick of the sight of her lawyer, and the perpetual invasions of milliners and jewellers. At last, the bridal party left London for Houghton. Miss Sedley had been wearying for their arrival, and there were but two weeks to elapse before the wedding. That fortnight flew, as it seemed: they could not make enough of Lettice during the little time she was to be left to them. Her school was to have a feast on the grand day; all the old women she had been accustomed to visit, were to be seen and taken leave of; friends and acquaintance were to be gathered and entertained. Maude lived in a whirl of excitement.

The only two who shewed signs of comfort and ease, were Lennox Gower and Lettice; and even she had many a quiet fit of happy

tears in her own room. She had been thus indulging herself the evening before the marriage: she had left the assembled guests, with Maude in the midst of them, and had stolen away secretly to her chamber. She sat by the open window, the moonlight streaming in, looking far away over the chase and hills to the distant horizon—wondering how long it would be before she should come back to it again, and weeping softly.

Suddenly an arm stole round her neck; Maude bent over her and kissed her, seeming not to notice the tears, the cause of which she believed she knew.

"So to-morrow, my baby Lettice is going to be married!" she said, with an effort at smiling: "To-morrow! It seems only the other day that you were running races with Rouser, and gathering wild flowers, and being very wilful over your lessons."

"Maude, I was thinking you would be dull," said Lettice, gently.

"Of course I shall be dull: I intend it. When you are off my hands, I shall attend to my duty; which I have neglected overmuch until

lately: but I shall miss you often," replied Maude.

"If it were not for this going away to India, I should be perfectly happy," said Lettice.

"So you will as it is, my darling: Colonel Gower's attachment to his profession will not interfere with that," returned Maude, cheerfully.

"But you will be lonely, Maude," persisted Lettice, looking up with tearful eyes in her sister's face, and fearing she was a little ungrateful for leaving Maude for anybody.

"You will not stay away for ever: I shall live in hope of your return. I shall find work to do: arrears of duty to make up. Do you think yourself so precious, Letty, that Houghton will cease to exist in your absence?" and Maude tried to assume a tone of raillery.

"I know you'll miss me, if it were only for the trouble I have given you," laughed Lettice.

"You will belong to somebody else to-morrow, who will manage you better," retorted Maude. "But look here, I have brought you some trinkets."

"Oh no, Maude! they are the Houghton diamonds: they are yours. I cannot take those away," remonstrated Lettice, putting them from her with her hand.

"Shall I ever wear them again? You know I shall not, Lettice. They are yours;" and as she spoke, Maude laid the sparkling gems on her sister's lap, and went out of the room.

Congregated in the saloon were all the invited guests for the morrow: all the Clares, Mr Grandiose, the Linnets, Lady Netherby, and several members of Colonel Gower's family. In the servants' hall they were holding high festival. Martha from Old Court was in the midst, telling them old world stories of the Talbot family, and making herself an oracle: she had come expressly to see the wedding, accompanied by Mrs Powys, who spent the evening in the old school-room with Miss Sedley.

CHAPTER XIV.

SUNLIGHT.

It has been said, with but little truth, that the English summer is made up of three fine days and a thunder-storm. If this observation were correct, it ought to have poured torrents and stormed awfully on Lettice Talbot's wedding-day; yet it certainly did not, though a week's settled weather might have led one to fear some such outburst on so momentous an occasion.

If ever the sun rose resplendently over Houghton Chase, it did on that glorious morning. Cyrus Evelyn remarked that it was a real old-fashioned day, such as he remembered when he was a lad; and Martha, smoothing down her starched muslin apron with woeful

gravity, confided to Mrs Mellow in a stage whisper, that if the weather had been made to order, it could not have been better: indeed, she averred that the Talbots always had sunny mornings for their marriages; and if the sun were not to shine for the like of them, who was it to shine for, she should like to know?

Mellow, in an April condition of tearful glee, overlooked the enormities of Betsy and Johnny, whom she heard exchanging kisses in the butler's pantry, and went off in good time with a bevy of white-ribboned damsels to the Church, to get a good place to see the last of Miss Lettice. All the village was there before her in its best array; and the old Church, with its floral decorations, and the warm August glow on its grey stones and monuments, had quite a bridal air.

The Reverend Theodore Grandiose, now Dean of Chesterton, was to perform the ceremony; and there he waited in full official costume, looking as benignly majestic as nobody but the Reverend Theodore Grandiose could look, when the first carriage whirled up to the

porch, and deposited its freight of gay and graceful bridesmaids.

There was scattering of flowers before the bride's feet, and pressing forward to gaze at her beauty, to admire and to wonder, as there always has been at aristocratic weddings since the "great world" began; there was the pleasant hum of youthful voices, and the pleasant light of youthful smiles, and all the glow and glitter of rich attire.

It was a very grand wedding indeed, and everybody said so.

Lettice was pale, and trembled excessively, as Sir James Clare led her up the aisle, under a cross-fire of admiring gazers; but when her death-cold fingers were clasped in the warm grasp of Lennox, the soft flush rose to her cheek; and though there was an ominous glitter on her downcast lashes, her marriage was not baptised with tears.

Miss Talbot claimed the next degree of attention. Old Martha, who thought the world could not shew her equal, scarcely took her eyes from her throughout the ceremony.

Maude stood rather aloof, her face as grave as ever, and fixed as if in pain; but with her proud mien unsoftened, and her glance clear and cold. Nobody would have guessed how that passionate heart was writhing under her icy exterior: how she would even then, if she could, have snatched Lettice from her lover, and have made her again the centre of vain, ambitious hopes.

Mr Tempest, calm and subdued for once, though he wore a new and peculiarly irritating coat, felt his elation in his nephew's grand alliance considerably damped by the haughty demeanour of his new connexion: he made up his mind—standing opposite to her sternly dignified figure with his thumbs inserted into his waistcoat pocket—that he and Semiramis never could be, and never would be, allies. And the crusty Squire was right. The Lady of Houghton avoided him on all possible occasions, and when they were thrown together, they invariably quarrelled.

Sara Clare also, with her usual acidity—aggravated probably by a consciousness of the unbecoming tint of lilac blossoms in her lace

bonnet—said to her mother, that Miss Talbot looked stately enough to be queen of the world, and she would not have such a face at her wedding—no, not for kingdoms.

Poor Lady Clare feared in her heart that she would not, but wished she might, for the peace and quietness of the family mansion, from which Sara's absence would have been looked on as an occasion of high festival.

There was one, however, who contemplated the scene with unalloyed satisfaction, and that one was Miriam Sedley. Her hopes for her darling Lettice were fully accomplished: she felt the child's happiness was safe in the hands to which it was committed, and she trusted to time to wear down the strong prejudices that Miss Talbot entertained against Lennox Gower.

Prejudices, fostered as Maude's had been, could not be expected to yield at once; and Miriam knew that Miss Talbot's consent to this marriage had been won, less by conviction of the justice of it, than by her love and fear for Lettice when she lay ill. In truth, Maude regarded it as a sacrifice to which she had

been driven by force of circumstances, and to the last day of her existence she never looked on it in any other light. Not that she permitted any to suspect her feelings, such as they were: disappointed and humbled, she hid them away carefully from every eye; and what she suffered, she suffered in silence.

The moment the ceremony was over, the bells rang out right cheerily, echoing through the still summer air over the hills, the woods, and the Chase, with a joyful melody. It was a long, long time since Houghton had heard so gay a wedding-peal; and it seemed to rejoice thereat, and put on its most glowing garb to honour the festival.

Lettice, in the midst of her full happiness, could notice this.

"I am glad," she said to Lennox; "I am very glad that all looks so bright: I shall carry away none but pleasant thoughts of Houghton. I always wished, that if ever I were to be married, it might be on such a day as this."

The leave-taking was sad and tender. It was for years: not for many perhaps; but it

handsome face; the glossy hair drawn away from the cheek, hollow, and of a less changeable red, the slight contraction of the brow, and the unwavering darkness of her sorrowful eye.

Old Saunders, in those tiresome daily journeyings, made many a true comment on his lady's thoughts, for he had well understood the main scenes of her life.

Mrs Warburton, in her bereaved old age, hears of her doing works such as men did in former times, thereby hoping to redeem their souls, and she thinks more tenderly of her in repentance than ever she did in her youth.

Mrs Powys is dead, and Cyrus Evelyn is gone, too, full of years and honours: theirs are faces that Lettice will miss when she comes home.

Miriam Sedley has gone back to Old Court. She never had her wish gratified of seeing Philip Warburton again, as we know: his death was her last great sorrow. In the Oriel chamber on winter nights, when the fire glints on the polished wainscot, she will sometimes forget the mid-time of her life, and picture to herself her grandmother's erect form

hot July days, seemed all the same to her. Always the same long, objectless ride over tracks, every foot of which must have been wearisome in its familiarity. Rarely turning to look at anything beyond her route, steadily on for miles, till weariness overpowered her, and she turned homeward. Winsome Willie's poor crazed mother shades her eyes, with palsied hand, to look after the proud lady, and says to herself that her curse has fallen heavily.

Maude often takes her way by the Manor House, now shut up, and wearing the air of desolation that the absence of a master leaves; sometimes even she draws her rein, and looks into the tangled wilderness of shrubbery where she had rambled that memorable autumn long ago with Philip Warburton and Lettice, recalling in fancy those two forms, and the shadow of her old self amongst the trees. Then on again by the hamlets amongst the hills, where Mr Burr lords it mightily over his poor parishioners, without let or hindrance; mechanically returning the salutes of the peasantry and passers on the way.

People say she is odd, and stare curiously, but furtively, at the sharpened though stil

handsome face; the glossy hair drawn away from the cheek, hollow, and of a less changeable red, the slight contraction of the brow, and the unwavering darkness of her sorrowful eye.

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opposite to her, and she a girl again, and Philip alive: but she leads an earnest life notwithstanding, and is a ministering spirit among the poor folk of the neighbourhood, though she does dream now and then.

Martha died, protesting to her last against "cotton lords and cotton muck:" and her last testimony was to her staunchness to the Talbots of the old blood.

Geoffry Meynell and his wife have two children; round, chubby, rosy little creatures, whom it does Maude's heart good to see. With her husband's love for her protection, it never happened that Nellie heard any slighting allusions to her father or sister. The Glen looks all the brighter for its mistress: you may hear her voice lilting a song as she goes about her work in the house. Her neighbours say of her, that she is a very comely woman, and the right person to help and comfort in time of trouble. Experience had endowed her with that gift.

The two new churches at Salford are finished, and have working ministers: men who go out amongst their people, and who know their

wants and their struggles: and, as might be expected, their churches are filled.

There is also a church at Hillside, and the school-house is at last provided with a master; but neither one nor the other has many occupants.

Mr Theodore Grandiose is still the rector, and Mr Burr the curate; there is not much to be done under them in the way of reformation.

About three miles from Salford, and between Salford and Houghton Priory, there stands at a hundred yards from the high road, an extensive substantial edifice, built of the grey stone that abounds in that neighbourhood. It is surrounded by well-tended pleasure grounds; and under the shady trees you may see, in warm clear weather, men and women, who have hitherto rotted in garrets and work-houses, sunning themselves in the light of heaven and breathing the pure air.

This is Maude Talbot's hospital for incurables. May God put into the hearts of some to

whom he has given the ten talents, the will to imitate her good deed!

Here, life is in its most miserable phase; but it is happier than it was: those poor suffering creatures bear their lot the more patiently, for seeing what is done to smooth it. Here Maude has had complete success: the great labour of her life is accomplished. She keeps the world aloof, and lives on quietly from day to day, without any new landmarks on her road; and now the errors of her youth, and its great suffering, shew with a softened gloom through the mists of time.

Those whom she has succoured rise up and call her blessed, and the good that she has done shall live after her.

Let us leave her there, sitting by the Christmas hearth, with God and her own thoughts: they are not bitterer than she can bear, and there is comfort in store, for Lettice and her husband are coming home.

THE END.